JEWISH LEGENDS OF THE MIDDLE AGES

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JEWISH LEGENDS OF THE MIDDLE AGES

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Selected and Translated by
CLAUD FIELD

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OF THE
MIDDLE AGES

By
WOLFF PASCHELES
AND OTHERS

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THE BIRD THAT SANG TO A BRIDEGROOM

"Hark! a bird began to sing so sweetly."

The Bird that Sang to a Bridegroom

A STRONG strange happiness is imparted to the young and pure. The soul, the divine spark feels itself at home in the body, created in God's image, and as long as the brain and the blood remain unsullied by evil thoughts or deeds, cannot conceive the idea of parting from it ; hence youth often believes itself immortal, and although not confiding this belief to any one, because the children of Adam and Eve are never able to trust in it entirely, hugs it in its bosom as a sweet secret.

A youth in the bright East, cherishing this

enthusiastic idea, was about to be married, and although loving his bride, felt sad at the thought that he must give up a costly privilege.

"I can understand," said he to himself, "that so long as we conquer the passions, even the nobler passions of our race, we are immortal, but that on descending to the usual level, and indulging in the enjoyments common to mortals, we cease to be immortal as individuals, but contribute to the immortality of our kind."

On the nuptial day this sadness came over him with more power than ever, and as soon as the ceremony was over, leaving his bride and the bridal party, he went to a wood near his garden and in fervent prayer thus addressed himself to God: "O God, before I leave Paradise, and take my wife to my heart, let me be favoured with but one glimpse or one sound from eternity. Almighty God! Thou who quenchest the thirst of the beast, send, I pray thee, a drop from heaven to refresh my burning soul, even at the risk of my needing it, when I come to dwell with Thee."

Hark! a bird began to sing so sweetly, in such rapturous strains as were never heard before. The sound descended into the bridegroom's heart, exalting, calming, lulling, satisfying; he was lifted up as on the strong arm of

the mountain-ascending sea-breeze; he was caressed, as when a child, at the bosom of his mother; he was refreshed as is the wanderer in the desert at the newly found spring; nay, he was happy beyond all this, every drop of his blood sharing the ineffably sweet emotion, every nerve and fibre vibrating as the chords of an Æolian harp, moved by the breath of angels.

The bird flew away, and the bridegroom returned to his house. On approaching, he was surprised to see no light. Hearing no sound from the merry party he had just left, and fancying it a trick played on him by his friends, he knocked gently at the window of his bride's room. Receiving no answer, he knocked louder and still louder, till the window was opened and the voice of a stranger was heard, saying, "Who is there?"

"I am! let me in to my bride!"

"There is no bride in this house, stranger; be good enough to leave us undisturbed."

He now saw that it was not his house. Puzzled and alarmed at his mistake, he wandered about in search of it during the whole night, but failing to find it, bewildered and in despair, he went to the synagogue at dawn. Seeing only strangers, and moved to tears, he cried aloud the names of his father and of his father-in-law. No one

answered, but presently a tottering, aged man advanced, asking in a faint voice, "Who is it that calls the names of the friends of my youth?"

"It is I! Do you not know me? I was married yesterday! Where is my bride? Where are my parents, my friends, my home?"

"What is the name of your bride?" asked the old man; and on hearing the answer, he exclaimed, "Oh, are you the bridegroom who so mysteriously disappeared forty years ago?"

"Forty years ago!" exclaimed the bridegroom. "Impossible! impossible! you are mocking me! In the name of Almighty God, I beseech you, tell me, where is my bride?"

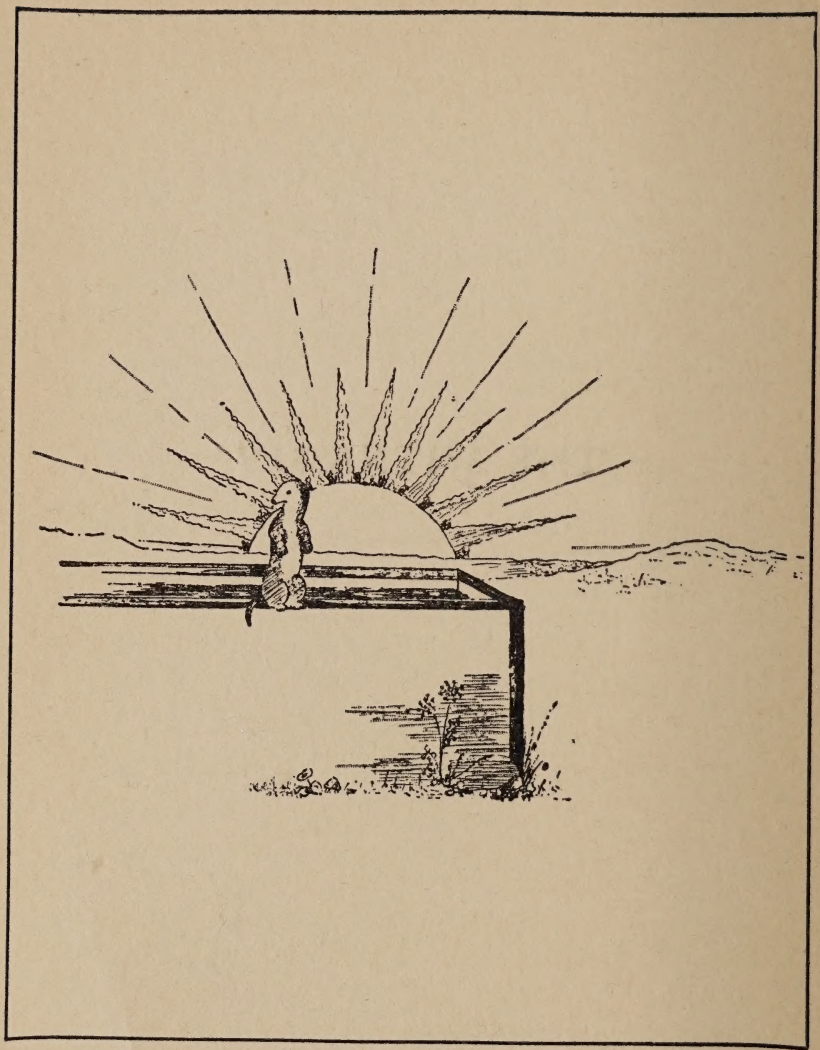
The old man taking his hand, and leading him to the cemetery, showed him the names of his father and mother, and also that of his bride, with an inscription, alluding to the mysterious disappearance of her bridegroom.

He sat down upon the mouldering tombstone, half covered with long grass, and wept bitterly, when the Angel of Death, gently approaching him, said—

"Thou didst extend thy wishes beyond the pale assigned to man. Misled by an egotistical pride and curiosity concealed beneath noble aspirations, thou wouldst separate love from

holiness, thus making thyself unfit for a holy marriage. But Almighty God in His mercy has willed that thy suffering and atonement shall be short, and has sent me, brother, to lead thee home."

THE WITNESSES



The Witnesses—The Tank and the Weasel.

The Witnesses

CHAIJIM ELIEZER had a daughter, the beautiful Rebecca, who once, on taking a walk, at some distance from her father's tent, fell into a tank. Having called for assistance in vain, not even an echo answering her, she gave up all hope, and prayed to God only for a gentle death and for blessings on her father, when a stranger, the young Nathaniel, happening to pass by, the sound of his steps awoke her hope afresh. On hearing her cries and looking down, and seeing in the tank the beautiful girl, Nathaniel was quite dazzled, and at the first moment did not know whether she was an angel, or a demon trying to ensnare him, but a few words from Rebecca soon dispelled his fears, and vigorously setting to work, he after a while brought her up in safety. He waived aside her warm thanks

and blessings, answering her with a passionate, admiring glance, "I am thankful to heaven that has graciously vouchsafed to me the privilege of beholding you, and assisting you in your need, by performing a service anybody could have done. I am only the instrument of the Power above, and I feel that from this day my fate is sealed; I shall only live for you, my future life shall be devoted to you."

The setting sun shone upon them, and in its rays the gratitude that filled Rebecca's heart quickly ripened into love. They did not leave the tank before they had exchanged vows of eternal love and fidelity, and Nathaniel, after telling her that he must go home to his parents, but would return to her as soon as possible, added: "I betroth myself to thee, and as no human being is present to bear me witness, I call as witnesses this tank and that beautiful little weasel which at this moment is slipping down its side."

They parted; but Nathaniel, on returning home, and seeing another beautiful maiden, married her and forgot his promise to Rebecca. He had one child, a little girl, which when only six months old was bitten on the throat by a weasel, and died. He then had another child, a boy, who before his second year fell into a tank

and was drowned. His wife, when the second babe was lying dead in the house, said to her husband: "This is very strange, Nathaniel, and my heart tells me that one of us must have offended God, either knowingly or unknowingly. Listen to me, my husband, and I will confess to thee all my thoughts, feelings and actions, as far as I remember them, that thou mayest judge me, and tell me what atonement to make."

"No," cried Nathaniel, casting himself to the ground, "I am the transgressor, the offender against God and man; the weasel that has bitten our girl and the tank that has killed our boy were once witnesses of my oath, and they have become the avengers of my perjury."

He then confessed all to his wife, and she said, "I see, Nathaniel, that though before man I have been thy lawful wife, I have not been so before God. You must divorce, repudiate me, and go and atone for thy sin."

Meanwhile Rebecca sat in her father's house, and old Chaijim Eliezer often begged her to accept one of her numerous suitors, and to gladden his old eyes by the sight of her nuptials, but she always replied that her faith was pledged to the man who had saved her life, and who under God's heaven, in the presence of the weasel and the tank, had betrothed himself to her. Thus

she waited patiently, though years went on, and began to tell her that youth was departing.

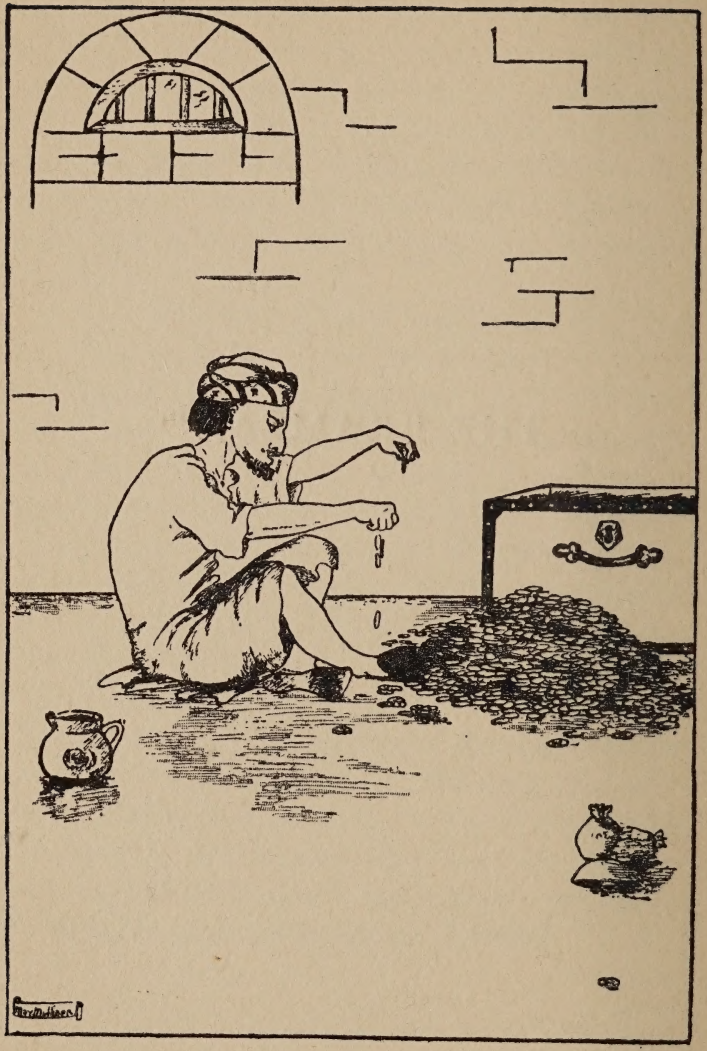
She was seated one day with her father in the doorway of his house. It was near sunset, thus adding another day of disappointment to the many that had gone before, when the footsteps of a stranger were heard, and Nathaniel appeared.

"Blessed be God!" said Chaijim Eliezer, "I shall live to see my daughter a bride."

Rebecca without a word had thrown herself into Nathaniel's arms, and then looking up into his eyes, and perceiving a shade of sadness or dissatisfaction, which she ascribed to the change years had wrought on her, she, weeping silently, hid her face on his bosom. But he, gently lifting her head, told her the whole story of his life since they had parted.

Rebecca then taking in silence the hand of her former lover, and leading him to the tank whence he had rescued her, said, "O heaven, that witnessed Nathaniel's promise to me, hearken and bear witness before God and man, that I give back Nathaniel his word, and release him from his oath, so that his marriage is lawful."

THE "KAMZAN"



"He would sit for many hours before his coffer."

The "Kamzan"

THERE was once a Mohel,[1] who was very avaricious. He had inherited some money, and his sole pleasure was to augment his wealth, and count his gold and silver coin. In his own opinion he was a religious man, for he observed all the ceremonies prescribed by the law, and believed himself especially pleasing to God, in performing the office of Mohel without asking any remuneration from the poor. His love of money increased with age, and he would sit for many hours before his coffer, gazing at his heaps of gold, riveted to the metal by a singular fascination, whilst he felt acute pain whenever he was obliged to part with even a farthing. People observing how difficult it was to get any

[1] Performer of the Rite of Circumcision.

money from him, called him "Kamzan," "the tongs," because he kept fast hold of what he grasped.

One day a stranger came and asked him to perform the office of Mohel to a son that had been born to him. As the carriage and horses of the stranger indicated wealth, the Mohel had a special pleasure in accepting the invitation, thus at the same time serving God and himself.

They drove on until dusk, when the stranger suddenly turning into a wild country, hurried madly on over the trackless heath. In vain the Mohel cried, "Stop!" and entreated the stranger to set him down; the more he cried and entreated, the more furiously the stranger whipped his horses, so that the Mohel at last was more dead than alive, and completely unable to pay any attention to the direction in which he was carried. Suddenly the carriage stopped at the gate of a park leading to a mansion, the splendour of which formed a singular contrast to the surrounding desolate landscape.

The Mohel was led to the chamber of the mother and infant, and when he for a moment was left alone with her, she said, "For God's sake do not eat or drink anything here, nor accept any gift; my husband is a spirit, and all here are spirits excepting myself." Her hus-

band now returned, and they talked of other matters.

Next morning, when the ceremony was to be performed, a large and merry party gathered round a plentiful breakfast table. The Mohel was led to the seat of honour, and the most delicate of the dishes were offered him; but under the pretext that he always fasted on such a day, he declined to eat, although it cost him great pain, accustomed as he was to satisfy his appetite at other people's tables. His pain was very much prolonged, for the party prolonged their breakfast to a late hour, during which the host never seemed to resign the hope of seeing his guest, the Mohel, break his fast.

At length the religious ceremony was performed. When it was finished, the host took the Mohel aside and said to him, "I am very much indebted to you for the great service you have shown me, and I beg you will accept a little token of my gratitude." So speaking, he opened a door leading into a large room, the walls of which were silver, and where immense piles of silver coin reached from the floor to the ceiling.

"Please take as much as you like," said the host.

The Mohel had involuntarily stretched out both hands towards the glittering piles, but

remembering what the woman had said, he as quickly let them drop and replied, "You owe me nothing."

"I beg your pardon for having offered you a gift unworthy of your acceptance," said his host, opening the door into another room, the walls of which were of gold, while piles of gold coin reached from the floor to the ceiling.

"Please take as much as you like," said the host.

The Mohel's head turned in the enchanted atmosphere, and it was only with the greatest effort that he could repeat to himself the woman's warning. He faintly said, "You owe me nothing; pray, let me go."

"Oh! I see," said his host, "you spurn anything like payment, and again I ask your pardon. This perhaps will be more to your taste."

So saying, he opened the door of a third room, where precious stones in large heaps, symmetrically arranged, dazzled the Mohel's eyes with a promise of that unspeakable pleasure of which he had only faintly dreamed, when brooding over his own coffer. But having resisted temptation in the silver and gold rooms, he found it easier now, and it cost him comparatively little effort to shake off the spell and to repeat: "You owe me nothing; only let me get home."

" Well, then, this way, if you please," said the host, leading him through an empty room, where only a number of keys were seen hanging on the walls. Instinctively the Mohel felt attracted by these keys and looked at them, until suddenly to his amazement he fancied he recognized the key of his own coffer. He turned to his host, who said, smiling, " Yes, Mohel, it is the key of thy coffer."

The Mohel became pale as death, and said, " How does it come here ? "

" Why, Mohel," said his host, " this is easily explained. Thou art at present among spirits, servants of the Lord. When a man orders a coffer, there are always two keys made : one is the man's, the other is God's. If God's key is not made use of, He delivers it over to us, and then the man is not himself master of his money, nor of his coffer. He can put in, but cannot take out ; and at last his own soul is locked up therein. Remember this ; and since thou hast gone through thy trial here, take God's key with thee, and try to make use of it, that thou mayest thyself be master of thy money."

RABBI RASHI'S COMPANION

"When he had fasted and prayed a long time."

Rabbi Rashi's Companion

ABBI RASHI lived in the eleventh century A.D. and was born at Troyes in France. His name is still mentioned with reverence next to that of Maimonides. He was a great mathematician and a very religious man. It is related of Rabbi Rashi that on reaching his sixtieth year and feeling himself approaching the end of life, he was desirous of knowing who was to be his companion in Paradise. He of course did not entertain the least doubt that such a pious and learned man as himself, who had never transgressed any ceremonial law, would be ushered into the Garden of Eden, and be seated at a golden table on a golden chair with a wreath of pearls round his head, and would be allowed to feast eternally on the glory of God. But he

wished to know who the pious man was that should be placed opposite to him at the same table, for the righteous sit two and two in Paradise. When he had fasted and prayed a long time, God deigned to reveal to him in a dream that his future companion was Don Abraham Gerson, called the Zadik (just) at Barcelona.

Having learned thus much, Rabbi Rashi became anxious to make acquaintance on earth with his future companion, and to this end undertook a journey to Barcelona. To his imagination the form of his paradisal friend presented itself with a thin pale face, sunken eyes, long beard, a bent figure, a man who had studied the law night and day, had fasted and prayed; for such a man only deserved the name of Zadik (" the righteous ").

Great therefore was the surprise of Rabbi Rashi, when on arriving at Barcelona he could find no Abraham Zadik. Several persons certainly had been honoured with this surname, but among them was no Abraham Gerson. At length, on his asking if there were not in the town a man called Abraham Gerson, he was answered, " What, do you mean Don Abraham the wealthy? How can a man like you condescend even to ask for such a heathen, who is never seen at synagogue the whole year round,

nay, who eats food prepared by Christians? We all wonder why he does not at once become baptized, and his name would thus be struck out from the Book of Life! Surely, Rabbi Rashi, you can have no business with him."

"A fine fellow is my future companion," thought Rabbi Rashi, and he cast back a rapid glance over his past life in order to discover any sin of omission or commission by which he might have incurred such a disgrace.

"Surely you will not visit that man," repeated the learned Rabbi to whom Rabbi Rashi had addressed his questions.

"Why, I may perhaps bring him back to the right path."

"Do not flatter yourself with that idea; on him all endeavours are lost. But do as you like."

When Rabbi Rashi reached the residence of Don Abraham, he was highly astonished, for it was a real palace, replete with beauty and taste, so that it even moved the heart of the old Rabbi, who could only find this fault with it, that it did not behove a son of Israel to live in such splendour, while so many of his brethren were doomed to live in poverty and squalor. On entering the gate he found himself in an open court, where servants in gilt livery were seen

moving to and fro receiving visitors, who had come in splendid carriages. The Rabbi wished to retire, and he only addressed himself to a servant in the hope of being dismissed and thus having a decent excuse, but the servant received him with the greatest respect, and ushered him up a broad marble staircase into a richly ornamented ante-room, where he requested him to wait a few moments. When left alone, the Rabbi said to himself, "There must be some mistake. This man is a bad Jew, a man of no religion at all; he has obtained here on earth his golden chair and his golden table—his Paradise; how can any such blessing be in store for him in the future? He is too rich to become converted into the right path of resignation and self-denial. But I will do my best; I am perhaps the instrument of God."

The door opened, and Don Abraham, a tall, handsome man of about thirty, made his appearance. With a friendly greeting he bade the Rabbi welcome, and added: "Let me hope that my humble roof may be honoured during a long period by the presence of such an excellent, learned, and pious guest."

"Pious!" exclaimed Rabbi Rashi, "how do you dare to say 'pious'—to talk of piety, you! a scorner of the Law! I announce to

you that I have come in the Name of the Lord our God."

"I am sure you have," interrupted Don Abraham smiling, "and therefore I repeat that you are most welcome; but as for your reproaches, you may as well reserve them, as I have once for all chosen my manner of life. Come, be friendly; let us become better acquainted; and, first of all, do favour me with your company to-morrow at the celebration of my nuptials."

"Ah! you are going to be married! and perhaps to a heathen girl?"

"No! to a daughter of Israel, a lovely, kind-hearted maiden. Come to-morrow and see her."

"Is she rich?"

"No."

"Well, if only she were led into a good Jewish house it would be agreeable in the sight of God. Meanwhile—who knows?—it may be a 'mitzwa' (good action). I will come."

The conversation was interrupted by a servant announcing a poor woman.

"Let her wait a moment," said Don Abraham.

"A poor woman!" exclaimed the Rabbi. "Your marriage is to take place to-morrow, and you have not yet thought of the poor, but

you allow them to come to remind you of your duty! For shame!"

"My dear Rabbi Rashi," said Don Abraham, "you are too severe. That you may judge for yourself, I beg you will accompany me to the woman, and ask her any questions you please."

They went into the room where she was waiting, and on being questioned by the Rabbi, she answered, "Alms have been given, as far as I know, to all the poor; but I do not come here for alms."

Rabbi Rashi was pleased to hear that his future companion was at least charitable; he was therefore silent, while Don Abraham asked the woman, "What is it you want; what can I do for you?"

"I want your advice," said the woman.

"Speak, and be sure you shall have friendly advice."

The woman said, "I am a poor widow with four children, three of whom are quite young. My eldest son, a youth of eighteen, worked for us, and by his honesty and industry has made us a comfortable, though modest, home; but now he is ill, dangerously ill."

"Then, my good woman, you must have a physician. I will send you my own doctor."

"No, Don Abraham, a physician is of no

avail; my son is ill through disappointed love. There is a young girl, poor and honest like himself, whom he had hoped to marry; but now the poor girl is forced by her parents to marry a rich man."

"Woman! why do you tell this to me?" said Don Abraham.

"Because you are the man, Don Abraham; and now having spoken, I leave you to God and to your conscience."

"What is your son's name?" asked Don Abraham faintly.

"Abraham-ben-Manuel."

When they were left alone, Rabbi Rashi seeing Don Abraham deadly pale, with large drops of sweat on his brow, said consolingly, "After all, it is nothing. I have never in my life heard of a man dying for love."

"Have you not?" said Don Abraham.

"No, indeed not. You may be quite sure that young fellow is not going to die. Young folks sometimes make a great noise about their love. After some time he will find another woman quite as handsome."

"There is no other beneath the sun!" Don Abraham exclaimed passionately. "There is but one sun in the heavens. Take it away and all is dark, the air is chilly, the meadow has no

verdure, the garden no flower! Take it away and you take life away! Life without love is nothing! Oh, the woman was right."

"Well, well, Don Abraham, I only wished to comfort you. It is the bounden duty of a guest to share the grief of his host. It may be disagreeable, nay, painful, to her lover, but I honestly think there is no danger of death. Such sorrows may be overcome, but of course something must be done for the family."

"You are right, Rabbi Rashi; I hope I shall have something arranged by to-morrow. Do not forget to come to mincha."[1]

Next day the Rabbi was punctual at the palace of Don Abraham, round which an immense crowd had gathered, while through the gate flowed a magnificent stream of guests, who eagerly brought their congratulations to the owner of the palace.

The "Khuppa" or baldachin, under which the wedding ceremony was to be performed, was erected in the court, the marble pavement of which was strewn with flowers. The prayer having been said, the bride, preceded by a band of music and by torches, was led into the court, when the notary read the marriage contract,

[1] The afternoon prayer with which the marriage ceremony commences.

upon which Don Abraham said, "There is but one little thing to be corrected; the name of the bridegroom is not Abraham Gerson, but Abraham-ben-Manuel; I have only been the 'schatchan.'[1] In all other respects the arrangements are unaltered, and I leave Abraham-ben-Manuel to conduct my business while I travel abroad. Hollo! let the musicians and torch-bearers accompany Abraham-ben-Manuel and his relatives into the court."

"Oh!" cried Rabbi Rashi, "thou art worthy, indeed, to be my companion in Paradise!"

At first the Rabbi's exclamation was unheeded, but he afterwards related his dream to Don Abraham, who replied good-humouredly, "I am glad to hear it; it is so pleasant to have a good neighbour; and besides," he added with quivering lips, "I shall come single."

[1] He who demands the bride from her parents for another.

MOSES MAIMONIDES AND THE LIME-KILN

"An old woman rushed out of a half-ruined cottage."

Moses Maimonides[1] and the Lime-Kiln

THE noon-day siesta was over and the Caliph awoke from the heavy sleep which the glowing sun of Cordova causes. He looked sad, and his eyes wandered with an expression of tedium over the splendid room. He seemed to regard his glittering surroundings with a certain annoyance. Suddenly, however, his expression changed, as his eyes fastened on an object which lay on the table. He sprang up quickly, hastened to the table, and seized a beautifully written manuscript whose outer cover bore the name "Moses-ben-Maimon." He glanced over the scroll, his eyes grew brighter moment by

[1] Famous Jewish philosopher.

moment, and at last he exclaimed enthusiastically, "O Moses, wonderful man! art thou an angel come from heaven to reveal to man the secrets of life and of eternity? What a depth of knowledge! Already I can see into a mine of mysteries. This manuscript is the golden key to the portals of a new world, which is indeed still hidden in the future, but whose dawn already glimmers redly on the horizon. Yes, this Moses is a prophet of the future, a wonderful physician, who heals quickly and simply every inward and outward disease, an inspired man and a favourite of God."

So saying the Caliph rose from his couch, summoned his servant, had himself dressed, and betook himself to his hall of audience, where he received his most distinguished courtiers, learned men, artists and talented ladies. A large number were already assembled there, and the Caliph greeted them in a friendly manner.

"Is not Maimonides here?" he asked, casting his eye over the assembly.

"No, your Majesty," answered one of the courtiers; "Maimonides thinks he has something better to do than to dance attendance in the court of his prince."

"What do you mean?" said the Caliph with a frown. "Can you never mention Maimonides

without an envious remark? Have I not several times openly declared that I value the man—yes! and love him, and do not require any strictures on his mode of life. Certainly," he added, "it is difficult for any great man to escape from slander. The more eloquently words of wisdom flow from his lips, the more busily hiss round him the tongues of slanderers. Enough! Send for Maimonides. I want him."

"Your Majesty," replied the courtier with a smile, "I am grieved to have aroused your anger, but I could not help it. I am too much devoted to my prince to tolerate that a learned Jew should show his spite against our state and religion as Maimonides does."

"Be silent!" the Caliph exclaimed angrily. "Maimonides is anything but a traitor. Just now I have been reading a manuscript which he sent me yesterday. It contains such a clear solution of a difficult problem in philosophy, as makes your accusation seem ridiculous."

So saying, the Caliph turned his back on the courtier and spoke with this one and the other about various matters, continually glancing towards the door in hope of seeing Maimonides enter.

Suddenly the door opened. Pale with fright, the servant who had been sent for Maimonides

rushed in, and panting for breath announced that Maimonides had just been murdered in the open street.

"Murdered!" exclaimed the Caliph. "Man! think what you are saying."

"Your Majesty, I speak the truth," stammered the servant; "Maimonides had preached in the synagogue and was on his way home. Suddenly two masked figures rushed past him; the one on the right plunged a dagger into his heart, so that he at once fell to the earth. A crowd collected round and a wild tumult arose, through which I could scarcely make my way to bring your Majesty the news."

The Caliph covered his face with both hands. Then he turned quickly to the assembly and said, "Excuse me, my friends, if I leave you. Maimonides was my friend. I must see him, and perhaps speak to him once more. May God grant that his eyes are not closed in death, and that I may once more see those clear stars which mirrored his pure soul."

The Caliph left the palace and hastened to the abode of Maimonides.

"Where is your master?" he asked the old servant who was busy in the vestibule.

"In his room, your Majesty. He is at work."

"What! At work! He is not in bed, but safe and sound?"

"Yes, your Majesty! The dagger pierced his mantle and the scroll of Scripture he carried beneath it, only slightly wounding his chest."

"Thank God!" exclaimed the Caliph, and hastened up to the room.

Maimonides came towards him, bowed himself and said, "May the Lord Who has saved me from the plots of my enemies bless your Majesty. I am still alive. The bitter gall-drops from the sword of the Angel of Death fell not upon my lips, which are still always ready to witness for the Truth."

"How thankful I am that you have escaped, my dear friend!" exclaimed the Caliph. "But tell me, is it true that the dagger pierced the roll of Scripture, which you brought from the synagogue?"

"Yes, your gracious Majesty, it is," said Maimonides, and took the scroll from his table. "Here is the hole made by the dagger."

The Caliph took the scroll, and read the verse through which the dagger had gone—

"Up, Lord! help me, for thou smitest all mine enemies upon the cheek-bone and breakest the teeth of the ungodly."

"God is great!" exclaimed the Caliph with emotion, and embraced the philosopher. From that day Maimonides was his declared friend and favourite. He rose daily higher in the good graces of the Caliph, who distinguished and honoured him, regardless of the attacks of the envious.

But Envy is an indefatigable messenger whose lips drip with poison. Where there is much wood, there is all the more fire, and as the envied increase in power, the anger of the envious also increases. As long as a ear is open to suspicion, slanderers will not cease to hiss and whisper. The above-mentioned courtier hated Maimonides all the more when he saw the learned Jew admitted to the closest intimacy with the Caliph.

One day he appeared before the prince and led the conversation as if accidentally to Maimonides.

"Your Majesty," he said with a smile, "I must beg your forgiveness. I thoughtlessly accused Maimonides of cherishing spite against the State; I withdraw my accusation. The philosopher will never be a political conspirator. But one thing still annoys me in him: it is dreadful to think that men should be so double-faced."

At these words the Caliph turned angrily upon the courtier.

"You are a scoundrel," he exclaimed, "whom my incredible forbearance has hitherto spared. But my patience has an end. You quit my court to-day."

"Your Majesty," replied the courtier, "hear me before you condemn me. Maimonides has declared openly in company that he finds it very unpleasant to talk with your Majesty, because—because—but I beg your Majesty's pardon for mentioning such a shameless falsehood in your presence."

"A falsehood of your own, you mean," the Caliph said coldly.

"No, no," the courtier protested, "a falsehood of that Maimonides, whom your Majesty idolizes, of that Maimonides who declared in public that he did not like talking with you because your breath smelt bad!"

"A shameless lie indeed!" exclaimed the Caliph angrily. "But he never said so."

"Try him yourself," said the courtier, smiling, "and then condemn me if you can."

This obstinate coolness of the courtier was not without effect upon the Caliph. He felt a slight doubt about Maimonides' fidelity and determined to test him. Meanwhile the wily

courtier had spoken in a similar strain to Maimonides.

"My learned sir," he said, "you think you are quite secure in the favour of your prince; but you are wrong; he is a peculiar and capricious character, of whom one is never sure. What complaint do you think he has made about you?"

"What?" asked Maimonides in astonishment.

"He said you had an ill-smelling breath which spoilt his pleasure in conversing with you."

When the courtier had gone, Maimonides smiled sadly and somewhat bitterly, took a long white handkerchief out of his box and went to the palace. It was the hour when the Caliph generally received the philosopher. When the latter entered the hall of audience he found the Caliph alone, gave him a friendly greeting, and approached him holding his handkerchief closely to his mouth, so as not to annoy him with his bad breath. But the Caliph, with similar sensitiveness, had placed a cloth before *his* mouth in order not to annoy his learned friend, but anger raged in his heart. The truth of the courtier's accusation seemed to him to be proved, and it seemed to him an unparalleled piece of treachery that a friend like Maimonides should openly accuse him of having an ill-

smelling breath. He determined to destroy his faithless friend. He dismissed him coldly, summoned a trusty servant, and ordered him to repair immediately to the great lime-kiln of Cordova, saying—

"If you find the lime-burner there, command him in my name to cast forthwith into the lime-kiln the man who will come in an hour's time, and who will ask whether the Caliph's order has been carried out."

The servant hastened to the lime-kiln. The Caliph despatched a second messenger to Maimonides bidding the philosopher to go immediately to the lime-kiln and to inquire of the lime-burner whether the Caliph's order had been executed. Meanwhile the Caliph had summoned the smooth-tongued courtier, thanked him for his fidelity, which he had to his regret, he said, misjudged, and assured him of his future and lasting favour. He also informed him of the plan for Maimonides' execution.

Evening was already approaching when Maimonides set out to fulfil the Caliph's order. A few stars already glimmered in the sky. The sweet scents of the lemon and orange groves which surrounded the walls of Cordova were wafted abroad in the cool, peaceful air of evening. Maimonides walked, silently thinking,

through the fragrant fields. His thoughts rose from earth to heaven. He contemplated the sapphire vault of the sky, and his feelings rose almost to ecstasy as the moon rose on the horizon and poured a flood of silver light over the broad plain. At this moment he felt that though he was created from the dust he had feelings and thoughts which were linked to eternity and could not be severed from it.

But all of a sudden he was roused from his musings. An old woman rushed out of a half-ruined cottage and cried, "Rabbi! Rabbi! come and comfort my sick daughter."

Maimonides answered, "Wait till I return. The Caliph has given me an order which I must not neglect."

But the old woman ceased not to conjure and implore him with all the urgency of a mother's grief. She begged so hard that Maimonides resisted no longer, but accompanied her into the cottage, where she led him to the straw pallet on which her daughter was resting.

The pale light of a lamp fell on the white face of the patient, who lay in a feverish delirium. She passed her hand over her bloodshot eyes as though the light hurt them. Maimonides, noticing this, bade the woman put out the lamp.

"But, Rabbi," she objected, "it is Sabbath

to-day. May one lawfully put out a light even if it annoys a sick person ? "

" Yes ! " said Maimonides, " do as I bid you." She obeyed. " Look there," he continued, " from heaven shine the lights of God through the window on thy daughter's bed, but their rays do not injure the weak eyes. Let thy daughter sleep, good woman, for when she wakes she will be well."

The mother gazed at his face with joy. She trusted his words, for she knew that he was a physician as well as a philosopher, and healed not only sick minds but sick bodies.

When Maimonides again stepped into the open the stars were all shining brightly. He walked rapidly on, and proceeded by a narrow footpath towards the huts where the lime-burners dwelt. Soon he had reached them, and saw how vapours and thick, choking smoke rose up from the lime-kiln chimneys, mingled with fiery rays that shot far into the darkness.

As he stepped into the courtyard he was confronted by a hissing, crackling furnace, glowing like an inferno. Four workmen stood there with wild, grinning faces lit up by the flames. Maimonides stepped nearer and asked, " Has the Caliph's command been executed ? "

The lime-burners laughed and pointed to-

wards the furnace. "Yes! that business is settled! The Caliph will praise his servants!"

Maimonides wondered at the answer, but was too loyal to pry into his prince's secrets. He left the lime-kiln quickly and returned home through the beautiful warm summer night.

The next day he betook himself to the hall of audience at the usual hour. Scarcely, however, had the Caliph's eye fallen upon him, than, as if terrified by an apparition, he rushed towards him and cried, "In God's name how come you here?"

"What startles you, my gracious prince?" asked Maimonides in mingled bewilderment and alarm.

"Did you not go yesterday as I ordered to the lime-kiln?" the Caliph asked trembling.

"Yes, your Majesty, and when I asked them, the lime-burners assured me that your command had been carried out. 'That business is settled' they said."

"Good God! what has happened?" cried the Caliph in a rage. "After all, an innocent man has been thrown into the furnace! Alas! Alas! what have I done?"

"Certainly nothing evil," answered Maimonides. "My prince is too circumspect to commit a crime."

"No! no! I was not circumspect!" exclaimed the Caliph. "Do you know what I have done? I intended to throw thee, Moses, into the lime-kiln furnace. That is why I sent thee thither yesterday."

"Me! my Prince!" cried Maimonides astonished, "and what had I done to deserve such a frightful death?"

"That courtier," replied the Caliph, "thy enemy, who had often endeavoured to blacken thy reputation, told me that you had openly declared in company that my breath had an ill smell, which made conversation with me unpleasant to you. I believed him, because shortly afterwards you appeared before me holding a handkerchief to your nose, and determined to destroy you."

"The same courtier," replied Maimonides, "who deceived my prince, deceived me also. He told me the same about you, and thus our mutual sensitiveness drew a veil across our eyes."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the Caliph. "Oh, let me embrace you, honoured and beloved friend, and forgive the injury I have done you. Henceforth thou shalt be the dearest treasure I possess, and no power on earth shall sever the bond of our friendship again."

The Caliph's arms were still round Maimonides

when a servant entered, and announced one of the lime-burners who wished to speak to him.

"Let him come in!" said the Caliph.

"Your gracious Majesty," said the man on entering, "according to your command we threw the man who came first into the furnace. Here is his watch and his signet-ring which we drew from his finger. My companions wished to keep them as their perquisites, but I brought them away, as they do not belong to us."

The Caliph quickly seized the signet-ring.

"Good God!" he cried in amazement, "this is the ring of thine enemy, the courtier, who slandered you to me!"

"Oh, inscrutable Wisdom!" cried Maimonides, "Thou hast saved me from destruction. Thanks, eternal thanks, to Thee that Thou hast laid bare the secret ways of the evil-doer."

"But tell me, friend," said the Caliph, "where wert thou, while the courtier was hurrying to the lime-kiln eager to hear of your death?"

"I sat by a sick girl's bed, and comforted her mother," answered Maimonides. "Meantime the malicious courtier could not wait to hear the news of my death. He went there before me, and found death, instead of the news he hoped to hear."

"Verily, God is just," said the Caliph.

THE WITNESS OF THE FIG-TREE

"I don't understand you, Hascham; speak clearly."

The Witness of the Fig-Tree

MORE than six hundred years ago Spain was rightly called "the happy land, the earthly paradise." Religious bigotry had not then roused internecine strife between the inhabitants and destroyed domestic peace. Every man was free to worship God in his own fashion, without being hated or despised for doing so. Even the Jews, oppressed and persecuted everywhere else, found in happy Spain a haven of refuge. Each of them sat in peace under his shady fig-tree and fruitful vine, and sang praises to the mighty God of Israel, Who had again shown pity to His people and given them the rest of which they had been so long deprived.

Many great men sprang at that time from the stock of Israel—sages, philosophers, poets and artists—whose names are still held in reverence,

such as Maimonides, Abarbanel, Aben Ezra and others. They were revered by the common people and favoured by princes and kings. Rarely in any congregation was there wanting some wise man who could teach; in nearly every town there was a school for the instruction of youth.

Prominent among these great men, who still to-day are the pride of the Jewish people, was the poet Solomon Ibn Gebirol, young in years, but of an aspiring spirit and a cultivated understanding. His bodily frame was strong and manly, his heart noble, and his life pure. All who knew Solomon, loved him, but his poems, in which was a strange mingling of humour and pathos, won for the inspired poet universal admiration. The youths' hearts beat higher, and the maidens' souls were entranced when they sang alternately the poet's lovely songs to the accompaniment of the mandoline, and old men, while they listened, thought of the vanished days of their youth. The fame of Solomon's poetry spread all over the land, every mouth was full of his praise, great men sought his friendship, and even the princes of Spain vied with one another in heaping favours and honours upon him. But all this did not make the son of Gebirol proud or ashamed of his

humble descent or of his people. No, in spite of his renown his heart remained modest and God-fearing.

One would hardly think that such a man could have enemies, yet one deadly enemy Solomon had. There is no possession on earth which does not call forth some one's envy; even the unsubstantial fame of a poet, that fleeting shadow, is not free from it. His neighbour Hascham, a Moor, envied Solomon's fame, and hated the man whom all the world loved. But it was not only his fame which had aroused Hascham's hatred—the poet had also stolen from him the heart of the fair Zulaima, a Moorish maiden, whom Hascham loved.

Delighted with Solomon's poems, she had expressed a wish to know him, and Hascham had introduced him to her. Scarcely had she seen him than she fell in love, and each of his visits fanned the flame of her passion higher. But with his mind fixed on higher things, he remained cold and did not return her affection.

The love of Southern women is stronger than that of those born in a colder clime, and Zulaima's was so intense that one day, when alone with Solomon, she confessed it to him.

"Noble maiden," he replied, "you seem to forget that we are sprung from different races:

you cannot be my bride and I cannot love you."

"Cannot love?" asked Zulaima, smiling, "why not? Has love anything to do with man's different modes of worship? Love does not ask, 'how do you pray?' but 'how do you love?' See! My beloved, I must have you at whatever price. Thy God shall be my God, and as thou prayest, I will pray."

Grace, beauty, wit and sagacity are women's weapons with which to bend the iron will of a man and soften his rude strength. Solomon could not resist the charm and witchery of the loving maiden; he fell on his knees before the beautiful Moorish girl, covered her hand with kisses, and the compact between them was sealed.

Hascham, who had already suspected the hated Jew, watched him carefully. Envy is keen-sighted, and he soon detected the relations between Zulaima and the poet. Mad with thirst for revenge, he resolved on the latter's death.

For some time he kept his malice concealed. He flattered the poet with honied phrases, vowed him friendship, and behaved as though he were one of his greatest admirers. Nothing is easier than to win the child-like confidence of a poet by praising his writings. Just as a

mother entirely trusts one who praises the beauty and behaviour of her children, so a poet gladly confides in one who praises the offspring of his brain.

Thus the noble Solomon trusted his false friend and accepted one day his invitation to come to his lonely villa. He had not the slightest suspicion of Hascham's evil design, even when he found no one in the house but Hascham, though some others were to have come. When Solomon asked about them, Hascham answered, "They will come; meantime we will stroll round the garden." Accordingly he led the unsuspecting poet thither.

It was a lovely spring evening; the air was cool and mild, and laden with odours of sweet-scented blossoms. The sun was approaching the horizon, the evening star glimmered in the east, and all the birds were mute except the nightingale, who was beginning her harmonious plaint.

Solomon's poetic soul drank in deep draughts the beauty of Nature. Thousands of images rose in his mind and songs involuntarily rose to his lips.

"How beautiful is life!" he exclaimed to his companion. "All Nature seems at work for man."

"Yes, life would be beautiful, were it not that often the thread suddenly breaks, when we hope to continue it for a long time still," replied Hascham.

"Yes, friend, you have spoken the truth," answered Solomon, "many a man in the full enjoyment of life and of the bloom of his manhood has been suddenly snatched away by death."

"Yes, like thee, cursed hypocrite!" growled Hascham to himself.

"What did you say?" asked the poet, who caught the first words. "I? what danger threatens me?"

Hascham made no reply. Meanwhile they had come to a lonely spot where stood a single fig-tree with many branches. It was not yet quite green, for the time had not come for it to put forth its broad leaves. Here and there a bud was opening, or a tender leaf freeing itself from its imprisonment.

"There is your grave!" said Solomon's host in a gloomy voice, pointing to a trench dug under the tree. "There you will rest to-night."

"I don't understand you, Hascham; speak clearly."

"Now you will understand!" cried Hascham, as he thrust a two-edged dagger into the breast of the defenceless man.

Solomon sank to the earth, but he was not yet dead, and said in a choking voice, "Villain, you have killed me, and there is no one to bear witness against you, but the All-Knowing will not leave you unpunished. The fruit of this fig-tree will speak and accuse you of murder."

Hascham laughed aloud, and said, "I will soak the roots of this tree with your blood that it may be silent." Soon afterwards he buried the body under the fig-tree and left the garden.

One can imagine how the beloved poet was missed in the days that followed. No one knew where he had gone, and therefore none could guess what had happened to him. Many weeks passed, and Solomon did not return. His parents wept over their lost, loved son, Zulaima pined in silent sorrow. Thus a whole year elapsed, and as time causes everything to be forgotten, even the memory of the beloved poet faded from men's minds. The murderer rejoiced over his cursed deed, hoping yet to make Zulaima his own. Again the quickening breath of spring returned and woke all the slumbering seeds to life; the meadows were clothed in fresh green, the orange and citron trees put forth young leaves, the olives, fig-trees and vines began to bud. Was the fig-tree

under which the murdered poet lay also about to blossom and bear fruit? Would it not wither untimely because it concealed a deed of horror? Would not the poet's noble blood blast its roots and kill its trunk? But no! It seemed as if the tree had drawn double strength from the blood of the murdered man, for while the other fig-trees were only just beginning to bud, this one was covered with the finest and juiciest figs which had ever been seen in the land. The owner rejoiced, and summoned his friends and acquaintances to admire the tree which was so forward in bearing fruit. Each of them was astonished at the extraordinary sight and asked how it was that only *this* tree bore fruit so early. Hascham smiled mysteriously and said, "Yes, my friends, I cannot reveal to you the magic which resides in this tree."

All the world began to talk of Hascham's wonderful fig-tree, and as usual in such cases, with exaggerations and additions. They spoke of Hascham as a wizard in league with infernal powers. At last the rumours reached the ears of the Caliph. He asked to be shown the wonderful tree, and came with his retinue one day into Hascham's garden.

As soon as the murderer saw the Caliph he

began to tremble, and when the latter asked to see the fig-tree, he turned deathly pale.

"What is the matter, Hascham?" said the Caliph. "It cannot grieve you that I should pluck some of the fruit of thy fine fig-tree. Come! lead me to it."

The villain collected himself and led the Caliph to the solitary tree. The Caliph and his courtiers were astounded, and the former said, "I can almost believe that as people say, you are in league with the Evil One. But come now, tell me the secret! I want to know it."

These words threw Hascham into great confusion. He gave such a confused, disconnected answer that the Caliph grew angry and insisted on knowing the secret. But Hascham could not speak. The Caliph enraged at his apparent obstinacy, ordered him to be examined by torture. Hascham at this, struck by an accusing conscience, threw himself at the Caliph's feet and begged for mercy before he confessed his crime. This aroused still more suspicion, and after the application of torture, the villain confessed.

Search was made, and the poet's body was discovered under the tree. All those present were aghast and demanded that the culprit should be executed according to the law. "No,"

said the Caliph, "the scoundrel shall be hung on the same tree which witnessed his crime. There let him rot, and accursed be any one who ever plucks fruit from this tree. Let the garden be laid waste and the fig-tree only be left for a warning."

The Caliph's orders were carried out; the murderer was hung on the fig-tree; the garden and arbour were destroyed, and for a long time the place was regarded as accursed and was avoided by all men.

THE APE AND THE GOLD PIECES

The Ape and the Gold Pieces.

The Ape and the Gold Pieces

MORE than three hundred years ago there lived in the City of Prague a poor but honest and pious Jew, whose daily business consisted in going through the streets with a sack over his shoulder crying, "Old clothes!" in a melancholy tone. At night, however, in his squalid room by the light of a dim lamp, he studied the Law. But in spite of all his industry, his wretched occupation did not bring in sufficient to meet the household expenses, and Rabbi Phinehas—so he was called—would have died of hunger, together with his wife and child, had not a noble and benevolent Count taken a liking to the honest man and helped him. Every Friday the Count took a reckoning from his protégé of the gains of the past week, and when these were not enough to enable him to

keep the Sabbath according to the Jewish ordinance, the nobleman made up the deficiency out of his own pocket. He helped him in a similar way on the other festivals. Rabbi Phinehas, it is true, thankfully recognized the kindness of his benefactor, but his deep religious sense made him regard the Count more in the light of an angel sent by God, and his manner of thanking was more like a prayer to the Deity than the acknowledgment of a private kindness. Every time when the Count made him a present, he looked towards heaven and said: "Lord, Thou desertest not Thy children; again Thou hast helped me!" And when on the day following the festival, the Count asked him how he had spent it, he always answered, "God has helped us!"

This conduct annoyed the Count, and he thought to himself: "What an ungrateful lot these Jews are! I load this Jew with kindness and help him to keep his Sabbath according to his Law, and yet he merely says God has helped him. I will see whether God will help him if I withdraw my hand for a time, and keep back my gift at the coming Passover feast."

It was then only a few days before this festival, for which every orthodox Jew, rich or poor, is compelled by the Law of the Talmud to lay in

eight days' provisions, and on the first two evenings of the Feast to drink four cups of wine with the unleavened bread. Even beggars are bound to drink four cups of wine, says the Talmud.

For many years past, as has been mentioned, Rabbi Phinehas had been accustomed to receive the necessary money for these festival days from the Count, but this time his benefactor wished to see whether God would help the Jew without him, and when the latter humbly reminded him of the coming festival, he answered, " My dear Phinehas, this time you must provide yourself with unleavened bread. I am just now in difficulties ; my money has not come in and I have had heavy expenses. Your God will certainly help you some other way."

Rabbi Phinehas' gaunt face certainly darkened as he heard these depressing words from his benefactor's lips, but his firm faith in the God of his fathers did not desert him. He shrugged his lean shoulders and said, with a pathetic gesture, " Well, God will help ! " and departed.

In the evening he returned home, sad at heart. His wife, who was anxiously waiting for him, and the children who were rejoicing in the prospect of the new clothes he had promised

them, rushed towards him with eager questions.

"How much did the good Count give to-day —God bless him!" said his wife, stretching out her open hand.

"How much? Nothing!" answered her husband gloomily, as he threw his empty sack in a corner and addressed himself to his evening prayers. But his wife, bitterly disappointed, nagged and scolded unceasingly, the children cried for hunger, and there was such a domestic tempest that Phinehas could find no peace. Silently he retired to his little chamber, locked the door in order to perform his devotions undisturbed, and as usual to study the Law by his dim lamp till midnight.

It was now nearly twelve o'clock. The children were already asleep on their wretched bed of straw, his wife had also been overcome by slumber as she cursed and grumbled. Rabbi Phinehas still sat by the light of the lamp before a great folio, thoughtfully stroking his beard and pondering a difficult passage in the Talmud. Suddenly the little window of his room was torn open, so that the panes rattled, a hideous form flew through the room and fell with a heavy thud at the feet of the deeply engrossed Rabbi. He uttered a cry of alarm, sprang from

his seat, seized the great folio and held it like a shield in front of him, while with quivering lips he murmured a formula of exorcism against evil spirits. At the same moment a fiendish laughter from many voices was heard, which confirmed the terrified Rabbi in the belief that evil spirits had come to attack him. He remained for some moments in the same attitude, holding the book in front of him, till his wife, aroused by his cry, knocked at the locked door of his room and thereby revived his courage.

Mastering his fears, he ventured a glance over the edge of his book, and lo ! a hideous object resembling a dead man lay before him with outstretched limbs. It was in fact the carcase of an ape. Although Rabbi Phinehas did not know much of zoology, he knew enough to distinguish a man from an ape. But this knowledge only served to heighten his alarm, for Rabbi Phinehas had a private and peculiar opinion about apes. He regarded them as a kind of half-human beings which some well-to-do people were in the habit of taming and making pets of, with a view to instilling moral qualities into them. A cultivated ape seemed to him almost equal to a proselyte. In his alarm he thought it was a conspiracy to bring him into trouble.

"Now they will come," he said to himself, "and destroy me and my brethren, for they will say that I have killed this creature. May God in heaven have mercy on me."

Meanwhile his terrified wife had violently wrenched the door open and nearly fainted at the sight of the animal lying on the ground. Yet her joy at seeing her husband still alive was greater than her fear, and she asked what had happened. After her husband had told her all, she said, "Yes, that is a plot to destroy us; we must get the dead ape out of the house."

"But how, and whither?" asked Rabbi Phinehas. "If I make a parcel of it and throw it into the water, I might easily fall into the hands of a watchman. Besides which, I am weak, and cannot carry this dead carcase."

After they had consulted together some time longer, Rabbi Phinehas suddenly exclaimed in a joyful voice: "Do you know, my child, what I shall do?"

"Tell us quickly," answered his wife.

"I will at once. Don't you remember what the Chief Rabbi did when a bad woman placed a dead child in his entrance hall, and accused him of murder?"

"Yes, I know; he discovered the plot, and had the child thrown into a furnace."

"And completely burnt," continued her husband, so that when the enraged mob broke into the house, they found no trace of a child at all. The Rabbi sat at his table and laughed at them. Yes! we will burn this creature. Quick! light the fire, and I will bring wood."

A large fire was kindled in the stove, and Rabbi Phinehas and his wife seized the ape by the feet in order to drag it into the kitchen. But they had hardly got halfway with it when the clink of dropping coin fell on their ears. Both let go of the burden in order to find out what it was. Rabbi Phinehas took the lamp, his wife a burning pine-splinter, and searched the ground with eager looks. Their trouble was richly rewarded. To their delight a ducat lay gleaming in the corner with a friendly twinkle like that of the morning star. Simultaneously both pounced upon it and cried, "Halves!"

In their excitement they had extinguished the light, and neither stirred from the place, fearing lest the other should snatch the coin, till Rabbi Phinehas reminded his spouse of the Talmudic Law: "What the wife finds, belongs to her husband." Then she rose from the ground and relighted the lamp. Who can picture the joy of Rabbi Phinehas, who for the first time in his life held a double ducat in

his hands as his own possession! He would have almost forgotten the *auto-da-fé* upon which he had resolved, had he not amid his joyful gesticulations fallen over the outstretched carcase. He recollected himself and seized the dead ape with fresh courage in order to drag it further. Then came a new surprise! A stream of gold coins poured out of its mouth. Rabbi Phinehas raised his eyes to heaven, folded his hands, and said in solemn tones: "I have been young, and now am old, yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread."

After he had prayed, he went to the children's bed and roused them from sleep with the words: "Up, children, and see the wonders of the Lord, which He has wrought for you." The half-awake children stood around the body of the gold-vomiting ape, while their father told them what had happened, and bade them praise God. When he had finished he took a large knife, and began to cut the body in pieces. He eagerly sought for the place whence the coins came, and soon found it. The beast's stomach was full of ducats. Rabbi Phinehas took them all out, and then burnt the pieces of the animal in the flames of the stove. The gold coins were washed and placed in a purse, the floor was

scoured and cleansed from bloodstains, and before the morning dawned no trace of the ape was left except the coins in the money-bag of the happy Phinehas. The next day, urged on by his wife, he hastened with some of the ducats to Rabbi Wechsler (from whom he generally obtained change for others when commissioned to do so), in order to convert the gold into small money with which to purchase the necessaries for the Passover festival.

"Whatever ye spend in honour of the feast, the Lord shall recompense it to you," says the Talmud, and the pious Phinehas brought all that his wife wanted, clothes for the children, a new suit for himself, clean linen, gold-embroidered caps and other things.

There was no lack of good wine and nourishing meat, and in the house where yesterday reigned the direst need, to-day all was prosperity and joy. Never was a Passover since the Exodus celebrated with so much joy and religious zeal as this one in the house of Rabbi Phinehas. The eight-branched lamp on the table and the candles in the wall niches illuminated the clean, warm room. Near the table was a cushioned couch adorned with flowers, arranged for the master of the house, who, wrapped in his shroud, reclined on it like a Turkish Pasha. The house-

wife sat opposite her husband, dressed in a long, white, many-pleated jacket, wearing a cap with broad silk ribbons, and filled the glasses with red wine. The children sat round the table, awaiting the coming feast with joyful impatience. The youngest was allowed to sit on the couch at his father's feet. On the table stood a round pewter dish on which were three unleavened cakes wrapped in a long napkin, water-cress, fried eggs, a piece of roast flesh, and a vessel with salt water. The dish was lifted up by the whole company, who recited simultaneously the verse: "This is the unleavened bread which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt; whosoever is hungry, let him come and partake with us!"

Suddenly the sound of a carriage was heard in the street, and before Rabbi Phinehas had ended the verse, a knocking was heard at the window, the room being on the ground floor. Pale with alarm, he rose from his couch trembling, in order to ascertain who the disturber was. A voice was heard outside: "Open, Phinehas! I have come to celebrate the Passover with you."

At first they all believed the late guest was no other than the Prophet Elijah who is believed to visit every pious family at Passover time, for

which reason a full glass is always set for him on the table. Accordingly the bolts were quickly drawn, the door was opened—and in came Phinehas' patron, the Count.

"Good heavens! Is it possible, your grace? Children, off with your caps and kiss his lordship's hand," cried the Rabbi, quite beside himself with excitement, and snatched the caps from his astonished children's heads.

"Don't disturb yourself, Phinehas, in your devotions. But what do I see?" exclaimed the Count in amazement, as he gazed round the room; "it looks as though you had become a rich man all of a sudden."

"Yes, your grace," the Rabbi said, with a joyful smile. "Yes, the Almighty has helped me. A few days ago I was absolutely penniless, and knew not how to celebrate this Passover as an Israelite should. But God's help came all at once, and I am now a rich man."

"Will you not tell me," asked the Count, "how your circumstances altered so suddenly."

"Yes, your grace, I can tell *you*, for you were always an angel, who loaded me with benefits," replied Phinehas, and began to relate his story.

The Count listened attentively, and when the Rabbi mentioned the ape he could not restrain his astonishment, and exclaimed, "What! a

dead ape! It must be mine after all! Certainly it is extraordinary. My pet ape died suddenly three days ago, and I had it taken out of the house at once. But what has that to do with your good fortune?"

When Rabbi Phinehas heard these words he was greatly alarmed; his whole body trembled, he grew deadly pale and could not speak a word. Silently he went to his chest, opened it, took out a bag and handed it to the Count, saying: "Your grace, here it all is except a few pieces, which I have spent in celebrating the Passover."

"What do you mean?" asked the Count in astonishment.

"Well, this money was inside the ape, and if the ape was your property, so is the gold."

"Ah! the beautiful golden ducats!" sighed his wife.

"Be quiet, woman! The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord," said Phinehas.

The Count turned to his servant, who stood at some distance looking confused, and asked: "Do you know anything more about the matter? Speak! I want to hear. How did the dead ape get here?"

"Forgive me, your excellency," the servant answered in alarm. "Jacob wanted to play

a trick on poor Phinehas, and threw the beast into his room; many of the servants knew about it."

"What! Jacob! The joke has turned out strangely," said the Count, smiling. "Nothing is more probable than that the foolish animal, in its desire to imitate, swallowed the gold pieces which it stole out of my desk. It had noticed how I tried the gold coins to see if they were genuine, with my teeth, and believed I ate gold!"

"Yes, certainly, your grace. The ape has killed itself by devouring ducats, and here they are!" said Phinehas, reaching the bag to the Count.

"No, my dear Phinehas, the God of your fathers has given you this money and it remains yours. I had withheld my usual gift from you to see whether God would help you without me, because you always said, 'God has helped me.' Now I know that trust in God is rewarded."

Who can describe the Rabbi's joy when he found himself in possession of such a sum? "Children! Wife! Kiss the feet of your benefactor! Fall down before the angel of the Lord!" cried the happy man, seizing the Count's hand and kissing it fervently. The children embraced his knees and kissed his garments.

The Count looked down on the group with a smile, feeling rewarded for his generosity. "I will spend this evening with you," he said, "and watch your ceremonies. The Countess shall come also, and hear the wonderful occurrence."

The carriage was sent, and in a short time the Countess came. The noble pair remained till midnight; the ceremonies were all duly performed, and they did not depart till Rabbi Phinehas had closed the final hymn with the words: "The Lord shall one day slay the Angel of Death."

THE POUND OF FLESH

" Turning round, he saw a beggar seated near,"

The Pound of Flesh[1]

I

ON a certain October evening in 1587 A.D. the gate of the Ghetto in Rome opened. The gate was usually closed at sunset, in order that no Jew should leave the quarter to which he was confined. A soldier was posted at the door and only allowed to open it in cases of absolute necessity.

On this evening when the gate opened, two persons dressed in black, a man and a woman, issued from it. The man had a proud, imperious bearing, but the woman looked coarse and common. Outside the gate they stood still, and the man said, "Have you arranged anything, Portia? Have you succeeded in winning the Jewish maiden for me?"

[1] From this legend Shakespeare derived the material for the *Merchant of Venice*.

"No, not at all," she answered, "the girl is as obstinate as ever, unmoved by flatteries and threats. If I promised her heaven, she would be just as immovable. With eyes red with weeping and pale face, she threw herself at my feet, clasped my knees and cried with sobs, 'Mercy for my poor, despairing, unhappy father!' She really touched me, and I found it difficult to stand firm and to tell her again the only price at which she could obtain your favour. Yes, Count Zavello, I have done my part, and left no stone unturned: I spoke of your youth, your noble appearance, your wealth, your love; I pictured to her the fate that would fall upon her father Shylock, if he did not pay the debt of a thousand zechines which he owes you. She implored, she wept, she wrung her hands; she drew a diamond ring, the bequest of her mother, from her finger, and offered it me, together with her best silk dress, but I remained firm, though not untouched. At last, when she saw that all was of no avail, she sprang up like a raging lioness and cried, 'Well, then! my father must die. He cannot be freed at the price of my shame. Let him die! I shall soon follow him and my mother. But you! infamous wretch! get out of my sight, lest I do you a mischief.' She looked as if she had gone mad, making

wild gestures, her two black eyes flaming like burning coals, her dark hair flying about her face, which glowed red with anger. Alarmed for my own safety, I hurried away."

"And I am to let the beautiful prey go!" exclaimed Antonio Zavello. "I cannot obtain the Jewish maiden! I am to renounce the charming Jessica! Never!"

"At any rate," answered Portia, "I am not going back into that Jewish house for all the treasures in the world. I advise you also, Antonio, to take care and be on your guard."

"Be on my guard," cried Antonio. "What? against these Jewish vermin, who only writhe when they are trampled on. Though every means to bend the stubborn Jewess has hitherto failed, there is one left which will succeed. To-morrow I will give the Romans for their October festival such a spectacle as they never had, even in Diocletian's time, when the defenceless Christians were thrown to the wild beasts. I have already prepared the public for this spectacle, by distributing alms among the poor, in order to show my gratitude for winning the lawsuit against the Jew who owes me a thousand zechines. I will set the whole town in commotion to-morrow, and the laziest lie-a-bed shall be early on his legs. And I will also pay back

our Holy Father the Pope what I owe him, in his own coin. Does he intend with his strictness and severity to suppress everything and to trample on our old rights and privileges ? He shall learn how one may make a use of strict justice, and his own weapon shall be turned against himself." So saying, with a scornful laugh, he disappeared in the dark maze of streets with his companion.

II

Felix Peretti, Cardinal of Montalto, subsequently Pope Sixtus V, has left a splendid example of what reforms may be accomplished in a short time by a man of energetic and fiery will who is set upon righteousness. During the five years of his Papacy, he raised Rome to new renown and splendour and reduced the anarchy and chaos in the Church to order. He put down the robber-bands of the Condottieri, rendered powerless their leaders and the nobles in whose pay they stood, and restored the imperilled security of men's property and persons in such a degree that, as the saying went, one might walk in the high roads with his money in his open, outstretched hand, wherever the authority of Sixtus extended. He breathed

new life into the disturbed state by winning respect for law, trust in order, and inspiring the enemies of society with awe. While still a Cardinal, Peretti had been distinguished by his austere morality, his blameless life and personal purity. By his stern self-discipline he gained the highest respect of the few really religious characters; on the other hand, towards the associations of those whom selfishness and sensuality had banded together in schemes for robbery and murder, he showed an apparent weakness that made them bolder and more reckless than ever. But when he was elevated to the chair of St. Peter, and intoned the Te Deum in a lion-like voice that made the dome of the church ring, the aristocrats, who were now his subordinates, were alarmed, and the offenders among them were abashed.

Sixtus was often wont, when the evening bells had finished ringing the Ave Maria, to leave the Vatican, disguised in beggar's garb and to wander through the meanest and most secret streets of Rome in order to acquaint himself with the condition and circumstances of the populace, and to ascertain how the laws which he had promulgated for the establishment of order were carried out. For this purpose he used a private door in the Vatican, of which no one

knew anything. On the day after such a night excursion, in which the Pope had had opportunity to discover various crimes against morality and flagrant contempt of his own authority, proceedings against the offenders were taken with rigorous severity.

On the evening on which the above-mentioned conversation had taken place between Antonio and Portia, Sixtus had seated himself on the base of a column near the door of the Ghetto and listened to their conversation without being observed.

III

The lavish alms which Antonio had caused to be distributed among the poor in Rome in order to display his joy at having won the law-case against the Jew were the cause of the Pope's visit to the Ghetto. It was one of the fine October days on which the populace of Rome gave themselves up to enjoyment and recreation. Sixtus himself wished to take part in this joy and to be rid of the cares of his life for once. After he had heard Mass early in the morning, and paced up and down his room a few times, he said to himself, " To-day I will for once again be free from care. It is to-day exactly three years

since I was elevated from the Cardinalate and became Pope. Three anxious years have passed, in which the Chief Pastor of Christendom has not been allowed to have three days of peace and quietness. To-day for once I will descend to the lower happier strata of humanity where reigns perpetual peace in obscurity ; to-day I will eat a frugal meal among beggars, without fear of being poisoned—a meal which will have a better flavour than all the dainty dishes prepared by my cook."

Soon after this soliloquy, wrapped in a ragged beggar's cloak, he left the Vatican and strolled to the Church of St. Peter in Montorio. To his astonishment he observed an unusual number of beggars in the road, which increased noticeably as he neared the descent from the Janiculum by the convent of the same name. Male and female beggars of all ages and afflicted with all sorts of bodily ailments, cripples of all kinds, limped, crawled or crept in a long line, some of them up the shorter footpath, some of them along the main road. Before mid-day the whole dense crowd was assembled at the convent door, each provided with a tin bowl for soup. Among the rest Sixtus also stretched out his bowl for the savoury mess. He sat down in the shadow of a mulberry tree and ate his meal

with a good relish. When he had finished he exclaimed, "That was a good meal! may God bless it!"

Turning round, he saw a beggar seated near, who said, "The broth might have had a stronger flavour of meat, as the noble Antonio made an extra grant yesterday, but I don't see any difference. What think you? Antonio's hundred scudi will go down other throats than those of the poor."

"I think it tastes very good," answered Sixtus; "what it is generally like, I don't know, for this is the first time I have had a meal on the Janiculum."

"Are you a stranger in Rome, then?" said the beggar.

"Yes, I came here yesterday; I have lived till now in Civita Castellana, where every day was duller than the last, and the fare daily worse. In Rome, I thought, one will be better off."

"Oh," answered the beggar, "you may find yourself mistaken. Too many pigs, they say, spoil the pig-stye. But you won't be dull, and you come just in the nick of time. Antonio Zavello, to whose generosity we owe our savoury meal, has won his lawsuit against the Jew, and to-morrow the latter will be flayed at the Bocca della Verita."

"That is certainly extraordinary. 'Flaying a Jew?' you say."

"Yes, he borrowed money of Antonio and promised a pound of flesh near his heart in default of payment. It was meant as a jest, doubtless, but Antonio is going to make it earnest."

"How much is the debt?" asked Sixtus.

"They say a thousand zechines—certainly a lot of money for a pound of Jew's flesh, when the best bacon may be had for six bajocchi the pound. Zavello probably would give nothing for it, if the beast were dead. He probably does it only to see the Jew make grimaces when his flesh is cut, and to give the populace a unique spectacle for the October festival. If you like, come at six o'clock to-morrow to the Ghetto door, and I will meet you." So saying, the beggar limped away.

This narrative made a deep impression upon Sixtus, and caused him to resolve to look more closely into the matter, and thus he came to overhear the conversation at the Ghetto door as related above. If such an outrage was really contemplated, it must be prevented at all costs. "My pastoral staff," Sixtus said to himself, "must be exchanged for a sling. I must go into the matter thoroughly."

IV

After Antonio and Portia had departed, another scene took place at the Ghetto gate. Jessica, the daughter of Shylock, came hurrying to it, her looks full of despair, and resembling one distraught. The Pope rose from his seat, and stopped her, saying, "Whether away so hastily, my child?"

"Let me go!" cried Jessica. "You see, they will soon close the gate."

"Don't trouble about that," answered Sixtus. He approached the soldier on guard, and slipping a small silver coin into his hand, asked him to leave the door open for a few minutes, as he wished to speak with the Jewess. "Tell me," he then said, turning to her, "what has happened to make you look so grieved and distracted; I can sympathize, and perhaps help you."

"I thank you," answered Jessica, "for your sympathy and readiness to help, but you have no balm for my wounds."

"You must not despair altogether," said Sixtus, comforting her. "Remember the verse of the Psalms which says, 'He that keepeth Israel shall not slumber,' neither does He allow His appointed watchmen to slumber. Perhaps I

may be able, though only a poor beggar, to give you counsel or help. God often chooses the most unlikely means and instruments to protect the right. The shepherd boy David killed a giant and the exile Joseph saved thousands from hunger."

When Jessica heard these comforting words from the beggar's mouth, she felt reliance on him and said, "I have seen the cruel Antonio Zavello, who offers to spare my father's life only at the price of my innocence, and I have also seen the chief judge of the Rota, the uncle of Antonio. I begged for a few days' respite, hoping to get together the thousand zechines, but Antonio observing my despair, abides by his resolve. The judge dismissed me sternly, and said that now the pledge was due, it was too late to grant the postponement; his nephew would cut out the pound of flesh as gently as possible and have a skilled surgeon in attendance; such wounds were not always fatal. But may God send His angel to save us!" the maiden cried and shed bitter tears. "Man's help is of no avail because of the little time left. The cruel work will be done at daybreak. And sooner will a tiger let a boy pluck a sheep from his jaws than Antonio will let go of his prey."

"But how was it," asked Sixtus, "that your

father made such an extraordinary contract? You Jews are so careful in business."

"It was simply thus," answered Jessica, "the house-rent and some loans had brought my father's debt up to a thousand zechines. Antonio had been for a year a frequent guest with us, and my father was his most intimate friend. All of a sudden he demanded the repayment of his loan, together with the rent of several years. My father asked for delay, which Antonio granted. But he wished for a pledge, and since my father had not one of sufficient value, Antonio proposed that he should pledge a pound of his flesh. He seemed in jest and my father consented. But now the cunning tiger has made it bitter earnest, and consents to remit the debt only at the price of my innocence. But such disgrace neither I nor my father can endure."

Night had come on while they were talking, and the soldier threatened to shut the gate of the Ghetto, if Jessica did not at once go in, which she accordingly did.

Early next morning a sound of sawing and hammering was heard in the square named Bocca della Verita. The workmen were putting up the scaffold and discussed in indifferent tones the new method of execution. "But," Cecco

asked Beppo, "what is the gallows which has lain so long in the torture chamber of the Rota doing on the scaffold? Have you heard of any other execution to take place to-day?"

"No," answered Beppo, "it is still doubtful whether the Jew will die of the operation. Perhaps if he survives, he will be hung. A pound of flesh—merely twelve ounces apothecary's weight—is a trifle!"

Both laughed at the rough jest and came down from the already finished scaffold, round which a crowd was already collecting.

When it was full daylight, and the bells began to sound for early mass, the whole square, together with the windows and roofs of the neighbouring houses, was thronged with spectators. Now the prison door opened, and from it issued a company of halbardiers in shining armour with the condemned man in their midst, supported by a brother Jew on either side, and followed by the executioners. As the procession came over the bridge and passed by the gate of the Ghetto, cries of lamentation filled the air, for Shylock was honoured and loved by his co-religionists as a God-fearing and benevolent man. It was no crime that had brought this calamity upon him, but his guilelessness and

the cunning of an enemy who had insinuated himself into his intimacy.

The procession now approached the scaffold, close to which stood two cavaliers, Antonio and his servant Portia dressed as a page. Shylock when he saw them at the steps of the scaffold, lifted his eyes to heaven, as though praying for help. Supported by his friends, who repeated the prayers for the dead, he mounted the scaffold. When he had arrived there, his two brethren stripped him to the waist, while he himself prayed in a loud voice. He was distinctly heard, for all round reigned a deep silence.

Suddenly this silence was broken by a widespread murmur. All turned their heads, and the whole mass swayed to and fro. Pressing through the thickest of the throng on a white mule rode a senator in black velvet robe and cap, with a golden chain across his breast, and called to the executioner, who was just about to use his knife, to stop. Then he approached Antonio and said, "The Holy Father requests you, Antonio, through me, to waive your strict rights and to have compassion on the unhappy Jew."

"I simply insist on my right," the Count answered coldly.

"His Holiness does not ask you to give it up," replied the other; "he only requests that since the Jew has committed no crime, and the thousand zechines have been collected, you should not insist on the pound of flesh, but take the money instead."

"But the pledge is due; I don't want the money; I want the flesh of one of our Lord's murderers, for whose life you are so anxious."

"I request you, Antonio Zavello, in the name of His Holiness, for the third time, to give up your claim of the Jew, Shylock, an innocent, and, in spite of his errors, in his own way a pious man."

"I am not going to alter my decision; it remains," answered the Count scornfully.

"Well, then!" said the Senator, addressing the people, "there has been found for the Jew a witness above suspicion, who will be responsible for his life. Let him come!"

He made a signal with a handkerchief, and in the twinkling of an eye one of the royal lifeguards hurried over the bridge to the Vatican.

It was not long before the lifeguards approached in a body, and drove the people to right and left, and made a way for the Pope, who was mounted on his mule, and surrounded by several cardinals. The Pope rode up to the

scaffold, stationed himself opposite the accuser, and said in a voice of thunder, "I am the witness. That innocent man, whom you are just about to deliver to the knife of the executioner, suffers because you would only remit his debt at the price of his daughter's shame. You are a graceless scoundrel, and have made yourself liable to the penalty of the law, which punishes with death any attempt to seduce the innocent whether by force or by fraud, especially in the case of a Jewess. You have forfeited your life. Prepare for death. You have only an hour. Let the Jew keep the thousand zechines as an indemnity. Take him back to his daughter in the Ghetto."

Thus spoke Pope Sixtus the Fifth. Then he returned to the Vatican, accompanied by the cheers of the people, and secluded himself in his chambers for the rest of the day, so as to be out of reach of intercessions on behalf of the Count. In the evening he rode again to the place of execution and ordered Antonio's body to be given over to his relatives for burial. Then he returned to his palace pleased with the act of justice which he had been enabled to perform.

THE MASSACRE AT PRAGUE

"The rioters began to demolish the doors."

The Massacre at Prague

IT happened in the days of Wenceslaus "the Slothful," King of Bohemia, that a knight was violently in love with a Jewish maiden. She repelled his proposals with virtuous indignation. The knight, therefore, resolved to obtain his purpose by violence. The day of the Feast of the Atonement seemed to him the best suited for the accomplishment of his plan. He knew that Judith—so the maiden was named—would on that day be staying at home with her blind mother while all the other members of the family were at prayer in the synagogue.

On the evening of that day Judith was praying by the bedside of her slumbering mother. The door of the chamber opened, and her detested persecutor entered with sparkling eyes. Unmoved by her prayers or tears, he

already embraced her, when a lucky chance brought her brother home to inquire after the health of his mother and sister. The terrible wrath that took possession of him gave the man, naturally powerful, the strength of a giant. He wrenched the sword out of the villain's hand, who had only the women to thank that he did not pay for his villainy with his life. With kicks and grim mockery the outraged brother drove the scoundrel from the house. The knight, exposed to the scorn of the people, swore a deadly revenge against the Jews. He kept his word.

Long ago expelled from the ranks of the nobility on account of his worthless behaviour, the knight had cultivated a connexion with some discontented idle burghers of the city, and these he hoped to make the ministers of his vengeance. Some short time afterwards he put himself at the head of a mob, wrought up by frivolous pretexts to a frenzy of fanaticism, to murder the Jews and to plunder their Ghetto. The first who, frightened out of their peaceful dwellings, went to meet the robbers, were cut down. Determined though they were, the rest were overwhelmed by superior force, and, being unarmed, were compelled after an heroic struggle to take refuge in the synagogue, which was

already crowded with old men, women and children. Violent blows sounded heavily on the closed doors of the synagogue. "Open and give yourselves up!" yelled the knight from outside.

After a short pause of consultation answer was made that the Jews would deliver over their property to the rioters, would draw up a deed of gift of it, and only reserve for themselves absolute necessaries. They also promised to make no complaint to the king or council. In return, their wives and daughters were to be unmolested and no one compelled to change his religion.

"It is not your business," a voice from outside again shouted, "it is ours to dictate conditions. If you desire life and not a miserable death, open at once and abjure your faith. I grant but a short time for reflection; let it go by, and you are one and all given over to destruction."

No answer followed. Further resistance could not be thought of, and the hope that the king would at length put a stop to this unheard-of, unparalleled iniquity grew every moment less. The battle in the street—if the desperate resistance of a few unarmed men against an armed superior force could be called by that

name—had lasted long enough to have enabled King Wenceslaus to send to their assistance. As no help came, the Jews were at length constrained to believe that he did not trouble himself about their fate. A silence as of death reigned in the synagogue. Only here and there a suppressed sobbing, only here and there the cry of an infant was heard.

Once more the voice of the knight thundered, "I demand of you for the last time which do you choose, to abjure your faith or death?"

There was a momentary silence. Then a cry of thousands, "Death!" rose to the roof of the synagogue.

The rioters now began to demolish the doors with axes and hatchets. But the besieged in their deadly agony lifted up their voice in wonderful accord, and sang in solemn chorus the verses of the Psalm: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me."

The aged Rabbi of the synagogue had sunk on his knees in prayer upon the steps that led up to the ark containing the scroll of the Law. "Lord!" he prayed, "let us fall into Thy hands and not into the hands of man. Call to remembrance Thy mercy and favour which has

been ever of old. In anger be mindful of compassion; let Thy goodness be showed unto us as we do put our trust in Thee."

But God at this season did not succour His children; in His unsearchable counsels it was otherwise ordained. The first door was burst open; the mob pressed into the vestibule of the synagogue. A slight, frail barrier separated oppressed and oppressors.

"Lord!" cried the Rabbi, in accents of deepest despair, "grant that the walls of this house in which we and our fathers have glorified and blessed Thy name may fall together and bury us in their ruins. But let us not fall alive into the hands of the barbarians, let not our wives and maidens become the prey to the wicked."

"No!" now exclaimed a powerful voice, "that they shall not, Rabbi. Wives and maidens, do you prefer death at the hands of your fathers, husbands, brothers, death at your own hands, to shame and dishonour? Would you appear pure and innocent at the throne of the Almighty, instead of falling living victims into the hands of these blood-thirsty inhuman men outside—would you? Speak! time presses."

Again resounded from a hundred women's lips, "Death rather than dishonour!"

His lovely wife pressed up close to the side of the man who had thus spoken, her baby at her breast. "Let me be the first; let me receive my death at thy loved hands," she murmured. He clasped her to his breast.

"It must be done quickly," he said in a hollow voice. "The separation must be speedy. I never thought to part from you thus. Lord, most merciful, forgive us; we do it for Thy holy name's sake alone. Art thou ready?"

"I am," she said; "let me only once more for the last time kiss my innocent child."

With the keenest sorrow that can thrill a man's heart, the husband pressed a fervent parting kiss, a last touch of the hand upon the infant that absolutely refused to leave its mother. One stroke of the knife and a jet of blood sprinkled the child's face. The woman sank with a cry, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God," and fell lifeless to the ground.

All the other women, including Judith, followed the brave example. Many died by their own hands, many received their death-strokes from their husbands, fathers, brothers; but all of them without a murmur, silent and resigned to God's will. They had to tear away tender children, who, weeping, climbed on to their father's knees and piteously implored them not

to hurt their mothers. At last the dreadful work was accomplished; no woman fell alive into the hands of the persecutors. The last death-sigh was breathed and the few stout men, who had desired to defend the inner door only till then, stepped backward. A violent blow, and the door, the last bulwark, fell in, sending up clouds of dust. The knight brandishing his battle-axe stood on the steps that led up into the synagogue. His countenance was disfigured by fury. Behind him crowded a mass of people, armed with spits and clubs and iron flails. "Yield your women and children," he shouted in a voice of thunder, "and abjure your faith."

"Look at those blood-dripping corpses," said a man who stood nearest to the door; "they are our women and maidens; they have all preferred death to dishonour. Do you think that we men fear death at thy hands and the hands of thy murderous associates? Murder me, monster, and be accursed here and hereafter in this world and the next, for ever and ever!"

A moment afterwards the bold speaker lay on the ground weltering in his blood. At the sight of the countless corpses of the women the rage of the populace, that saw itself cheated of the best part of its booty, mounted to absolute madness. They behaved like hyaenas drunk

with blood. Not a life was spared, and even infants were slaughtered over the bodies of their mothers. Blood flowed in streams. One boy alone was dragged later on still alive from under the heaps of dead. As they approached the tabernacle, in order to inflict the death-stroke on the Rabbi, who was kneeling on the steps before it, they found him lifeless, his head turned in the direction of the East, a smile upon his pale features. Death had anticipated them. His pure soul had passed away in fervent prayer.

The mob surveyed the work that had been accomplished and, now that the thirst for blood was stilled, shrunk in terror from the crime that had been perpetrated. The tabernacle remained untouched, the synagogue unplundered. Discharging oaths and curses against the knight, their ringleader, the wild troop dispersed in awe and apprehension.

MOSES MAIMONIDES AND HIS PUPIL

" He fled to the Synagogue."

Moses Maimonides and his Pupil

FTER Moses the Lawgiver, Moses Maimonides is counted the greatest man among the Jews. If the former delivered his oppressed brethren from the shameful bondage of Egypt, it was Maimonides who opened the eyes of his co-religionists, which were, till then, closed by prejudice and superstition, for he was the first who, by his wisdom and deep insight, succeeded in drawing up a clear abstract and epitome of the many volumes of the Talmud. He was the first learned Jew to devote himself to the study of philosophy in spite of the contemporaneous Rabbis, and thus prepared the way for his successor. Physics and mathematics were his favourite studies; he was also deeply versed in history and geography and was a very skilful

physician. It is still a proverb among the Rabbis, "From Moses till Moses there was no one like Moses." The following popular tradition relates how this remarkable man gained his many-sided culture and wide knowledge in all branches of science.

I

Maimonides was the son of a poor butcher at Cordova. As his mother died while he was a child, and his father was too busy in his trade to trouble himself about the boy, the education of the little Moses was so neglected that at thirteen years of age he could neither pray nor read the Law. Accordingly his elder brothers and sisters despised him and gave him the nickname of Amhaaretz, "the ignorant." This vexed the sensitive child so much that he withdrew himself from all his companions and spent the greater part of the day weeping in a lonely room. One day, when his brothers and sisters had unmercifully persecuted him and ill-treated him, he fled to the Synagogue in order there to open his troubled heart to God.

He flung himself before the Holy Ark and wept aloud, "Lord of the world," he said, "give me the knowledge of Thy law, and send

me Thy holy prophet Elijah to instruct me in wisdom, that I may not remain the scorn of hard-hearted men."

With this prayer he fell asleep on the steps of the Ark, and dreamt a dream. It seemed to him as though the heaven opened and an angel approached him smiling. He then felt a slight blow on the shoulder, awoke, and saw a stranger with a long grey beard, who said in a friendly way, "Why liest thou asleep in this holy place? The house of God is not for slumber but for devotion."

"Sir," replied the frightened boy, "I did not come here to rest but to show the Lord the deep trouble of my heart."

"What is it then that troubles thee so much, young as thou art?"

"That I know not the law of the Lord, and can neither read nor write, and have no one to teach me; therefore have I prayed to God to send me the prophet Elijah."

"Well then, I am Elijah. Will you leave your father's house and follow me?"

"Joyfully," exclaimed the delighted boy, "why should I stay in my father's house? My mother is dead, my father loves me not, and my brothers and sisters torment and ridicule me."

"Very well, come with me, I will teach you."

So saying the stranger took the boy's hand and led him forth. They soon left the town behind them and after some days arrived in Africa.

At first the father, brothers and sisters of Maimonides were much troubled about his disappearance, and instituted a search for him. But when they found that all search was vain, they comforted themselves with the thought that perhaps the Lord had predestinated him to be a governor like Joseph and that some day the despised ignorant boy might return with riches and honour.

Ten years passed and the young Maimonides had been almost forgotten, when there came to Cordova a young foreign Rabbi who preached in the synagogue. The congregation was delighted at the eloquence and learning of the preacher, who seemed barely twenty-four years old, though nobody knew who he was or whence he came. The whole town talked about him, and at last the rumour reached his father's house. Although the latter seldom listened to a sermon, as he was too ignorant to understand them, he resolved out of curiosity to hear the renowned preacher on the next Sabbath.

The day came ; the people crowded into the synagogue and Maimonides' father with his sons were there. The young preacher mounted the pulpit, began his sermon in a deliberate voice, and built up the structure of his discourse so elaborately that all his hearers were delighted and convinced. They were even more enthusiastic than on the first occasion and satisfaction was depicted on all their faces. The sermon ended and murmurs of applause were heard from the congregation, when the preacher's voice was again heard. "My respected hearers," he began, "I am delighted to see from your friendly faces that you are pleased with my preaching. You have made me the flattering proposal to become the principal of your college, and I feel myself highly honoured and am delighted to be able to render a service to the congregation to whom I belong. For know that I am the son of Maimon the butcher ; I am the ignorant boy Moses, who ten years ago disappeared from your midst." No pen can describe the joy and amazement of his old father, and the astonishment of his brothers.

Maimonides' teacher is said to have been none other than the prophet Elijah, who had during ten years taught him not only all the oral and written traditions of the Law, but also

all collateral sciences, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc. At the same time he gave his pupil two valuable books, which long remained hidden, the book of the Creation and that of Healing. By the help of these two books Maimonides was enabled to investigate the profoundest secrets of nature, and to heal all sicknesses. Concerning this the following legend is related.

II

The fame of Maimonides spread all over Europe. In the most distant countries people talked of the deep wisdom and wonderful cures of the famous Jewish physician of Spain. On one occasion a certain youth, the only son of a rich merchant in London, whose thirst for knowledge the teachers of his own land could not satisfy, left his parents' house secretly and came to Cordova, drawn by the fame of Maimonides. Not without difficulty did he reach the goal of his desire, for the eager youth did not wish only to be the pupil and hearer of his teacher, but to observe him in all the details of his domestic life, and to penetrate into all the secrets and mysteries which public teachers do not usually make known to their diversely

gifted scholars. The youth knew well that these great men have two natures, and the wisest and apparently most virtuous teacher in the pulpit often displays vulgarity and selfishness in domestic and civic life. He employed a pardonable stratagem to obtain his object ; he pretended to be deaf and dumb. Clothed meanly and with a humble air he appeared before the learned Rabbi and gave him to understand by plaintive gestures that he wished to be his servant in return for his daily bread.

Maimonides was touched by his apparently pitiful condition and engaged him as his servant. The latter by his attentiveness and careful carrying out of the duties entrusted to him won the favour and confidence of his master to such a degree that he employed him as an assistant in all his chemical and physical experiments, which he carried on in secret for fear of popular prejudice. He never suspected that his pupil might betray him. Meanwhile the docile student had not only grown familiar with practical experiments but thoroughly acquainted himself with the underlying theories. For, during his master's absences he studied his books and writings with such zeal, that in a few years he was not far behind Maimonides himself.

About this time a nobleman of the Court was attacked by a strange disease. There was no trace of anything wrong in his whole body, only sometimes he grew giddy so that he whirled round in a circle as if compelled by unseen powers till he fell to the ground, powerless and quite exhausted.

After all the learned physicians of the Court had tried their skill and arts in vain, and the courtier's life was in the greatest danger, as a last resource Maimonides was summoned; he at once diagnosed the disease accurately and said to the assembled relatives of the sick man, "Only an operation can save him, for he suffers from a worm in the brain which generally attacks sheep, but seldom men. I must make an incision in his skull and remove the worm; else there is no hope."

It may be imagined how much consternation these words of the Jewish doctor caused, and that such a dangerous operation was not easily resolved upon.

Several weeks elapsed before the sick nobleman could make up his mind to allow his head to be opened. But at last, as the sickness became more violent and his fits more frequent and lasting, he consented. Maimonides and his servant came with the necessary surgical instru-

ments to the sick man's house, where a crowd of inquisitive doctors had assembled. With cool deliberation and a steady skilful hand, Maimonides carried out the dangerous operation. The skull was trepanned, the torturing vermin was seen lying motionless on the sensitive brain; all those present were wondering at the skill and wisdom of Maimonides, who was about to remove the worm with a small pair of pincers, when a voice exclaimed, "Stop! master! you will kill the man!"

Maimonides was startled, let the pincers fall and turned towards the speaker. It was his own servant.

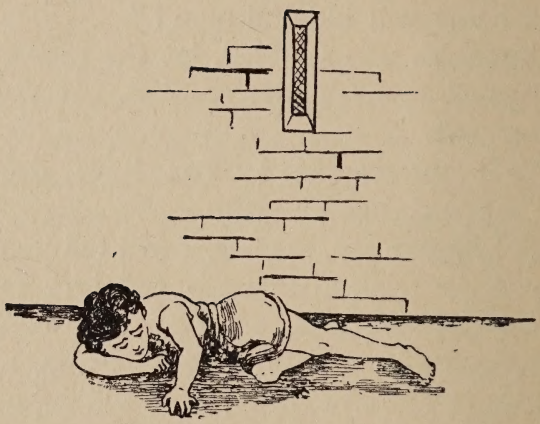
"What means this? You have deceived me!" he exclaimed angrily.

"Oh! forgive me, master, I will tell you why I played the trick afterwards, but just now let us save the sick man. Look, this worm has seized the brain tightly with its claws, and if you tear it forcibly away, you will injure the brain itself and the man will die."

"How shall we remove the worm then?" asked Maimonides abashed.

"Sir," the servant replied modestly, "it is written in one of the manuscripts, 'lay a leaf of —— (the name of an unknown plant) near, and the worm will leave its place and crawl to

it.' " Maimonides remembered the recipe and had the designated plant brought. The nobleman was healed and Maimonides became his private physician.



THE DELIVERER

"A horseman was flying towards the Jews' quarter."

The Deliverer

IT was the eve of the first day of the Passover in the year 1559. Afternoon service was just over, and large crowds of people streamed out of the synagogues in the Jews' quarter at Prague, and hurried home to perform the other religious offices prescribed for that night. Gradually the streets became empty, but from the windows came a friendly light and the loud voices of worshippers who were singing hymns of praise and saying their prayers.

One house was especially conspicuous for the blinding beams of light that shone from its windows, and fell upon the street. It was the house of Mordechai Cohen Zemach. Mordechai was the only son of Reb Gerson, a wealthy goldsmith, and had in his earliest youth evinced

signs of extraordinary talent. His father had given him an excellent education and had sown upon a fruitful soil. Till far on in his childhood the life of Mordechai had been calm and prosperous. Suddenly however circumstances changed. Reb Gerson by a rapid succession of unmerited misfortunes lost the whole of his property and found himself unable to meet the liabilities which he had incurred. Sorrow at the loss of his good name stretched the honest man on a sick bed, from which he never rose again.

At the age of seventeen Mordechai was left an orphan. He was alone in the world, for his mother he had already lost when a child. His first resolution, when the first stupor of grief was passed, was to restore the honoured name of his departed father. He took to business and pursued it with unwearied assiduity so that scarce five years had elapsed before he had paid off all his father's creditors. In the meantime he had fallen in love with a maiden, the daughter of his neighbour, but he had nothing to offer her. He was poor; he had sacrificed the rewards of his industry to the sacred memory of his father. Suddenly, however, she too became an orphan, and as a royal edict soon afterwards expelled the Jews from Bohemia and the poor

girl did not know whither to turn her steps, Mordechai proposed to her to become the partner of his fate. Bela followed him after they had been married to Poland, where most of the exiles found a refuge.

Eight years afterwards, in the year 1551, King Ferdinand I recalled the Jews home. Among those who pined for the land of their birth and returned to Prague were Reb Mordechai and his wife. He again established himself in Prague. His vast knowledge won him the highest esteem and regard; his noble heart the love of his neighbours. By industry and economy during his residence in Poland he had succeeded in acquiring a property by no means inconsiderable for that age.

About a year after his return from Poland he found one day by the river a young man on the point of drowning himself in despair. Mordechai's questions elicited the fact that the young man was private secretary to the Emperor, and had, in a moment of weakness, lent a large sum belonging to his master to a friend, who had absconded. Mordechai, struck with pity, lent the stranger sufficient money to cover the deficit. The latter departed with loud expressions of gratitude, but Mordechai felt doubtful whether he should ever see him again, and had to bear

the reproaches of his wife for his apparently foolish generosity.

We return to the night of the Passover. The evening meal was just over and all were uniting in one great hymn of praise, when a sudden knock was heard at the door, and a stranger craved an immediate interview with the master of the house. As soon as the stranger was alone with Reb Mordechai, he flung off his hat and cloak, and threw himself into his arms. It was the young man whose honour and life he had once saved. He came to warn Reb Mordechai of a calamity which impended over the Jews and to point out the only way in which it might be averted. The Emperor had vowed in consequence of a dream that he would expel the Jews from Bohemia, and was resolved to perform what he had sworn. Except his secretary, none, not even his most confidential ministers, as yet, knew anything of the imperial resolution. It was necessary therefore that the most inviolable secrecy should be preserved as to the means by which the information had been obtained, and as to the mode in which an attempt was to be made to countermine the intended cruelty.

After an interview of many hours, the secretary took his leave. Mordechai accompanied

him to the gate of the Jews' quarter, which was opened for them. The two men pressed each other's hands in sign of leave-taking, and after a few last words of whispered counsel, the secretary stepped through the gate, and walked on to the hostelry.

Mordechai lifted his glowing face to the heavens. "Lord of the world," he cried, "Thou art all-merciful, all-knowing, almighty! Why then should we despair? Can it be Thy pleasure that Thy children should be driven into adversity? They wish to banish us. Why? By what right? They say that we are strangers in this land, in this beautiful Bohemia. Has not God made the whole world, and are not we too His children? We are strangers, and yet the graves of our fathers lie in this land. We are strangers, and yet we have for centuries suffered and endured in this country. We are strangers, yet we dwell as long in the land as its other inhabitants."

Mordechai might have remained standing still longer in the street lost in these thoughts. But the atmosphere was suddenly agitated by a sharp gust of wind. Then a warm breeze of spring came gently whispering through the air. The fragrant breath of the wind which fanned Mordechai's hot face roused him from his

dreams. It seemed to him as though it were a morning salutation from the Father of all men to His sons, which proclaimed peace, "Peace, peace, to far and near—to all My children peace!"

Mordechai then proceeded to the house of the chief Rabbi and imparted to him the secret which he had learnt that night, and also his resolution instantly at break of day to set off for Vienna, that he might there endeavour to prevent the impending calamity in the manner which had been suggested to him by the secretary. The chief Rabbi approved the plan, and Reb Mordechai returned home in order to get ready for the journey, and to bid his family farewell. As morning dawned on the first day of the Passover, Mordechai passed through the Wischerheder gate, vaulted upon a horse that stood ready saddled outside, and fled swiftly on the road leading to Vienna.

After morning service on the same day, the chief Rabbi invited the leading members of the community to a secret meeting and informed them of what had taken place—namely, that Mordechai had the night before received from a sure source the unexpected intelligence that the Emperor intended to banish all the Jews from Prague and Bohemia, and had hurried

off to Vienna to pursue the course pointed out by his secret informant as the only one which might possibly effect a change in the emperor's resolution. This was to proceed to Rome and to obtain letters from the Pope absolving the emperor from the rash vow he had made. The Rabbi impressed upon the meeting that Reb Mordechai, who by his rare intellectual powers, his learning, and especially by the fact that he must be favoured by some high personage, since he had before any one else been put in possession of so important a secret, was, without doubt, the fittest representative of their community; and at any rate, that it be best quietly to await the end of the affair; and on no account to allow the inauspicious tidings to be too soon noised abroad among the people.

It was not, therefore, till about midway between Easter and Pentecost that dark rumours began to spread abroad in the Jewish community of Prague about some terrible news which the chief Rabbi had communicated to the leading persons of the society on the first day of the Passover. The narrow circle indeed who had heard it from the Rabbi's own mouth preserved the profoundest silence; but several Jews who carried their wares from house to house in other quarters of the city, were recom-

mended to sell at a moderate price, as they were soon to be sent into banishment, and would then be unable to sell anything.

At first the poor Jews paid no attention to what they heard, and looked upon it as a mere mockery to be patiently endured; but by degrees they were satisfied that it was no joke and that in very truth tidings had arrived from Vienna, that, in pursuance of an Imperial decree, all the Jews were to leave Bohemia. Presently nothing was talked about but this impending calamity. The absence of Reb Mordechai had already been observed, but it was not yet known that his journey had been undertaken for the common weal. Now, however, the chief Rabbi and authorities assured every one that they had long been informed of the circumstance, that they would make every effort in their power, and that Reb Mordechai had gone to Vienna as their advocate. This news had at first a soothing effect.

But their hopes, alas! soon became clouded. No letter had arrived from Mordechai. Information was at length received and they learnt that Mordechai had left Vienna, but whither he had gone they knew not.

At a full meeting it was proposed that a deputation should be sent to Vienna in order

to lay their righteous cause at the foot of the throne. The majority voted with the proposer, but the chief Rabbi opposed the measure. "If salvation," he said, "is possible, if any human being is able to induce the Emperor's Majesty to recede from a resolution that he has formed, it is Reb Mordechai. I was moreover," he added, "perfectly satisfied by Reb Mordechai that there was but one way of salvation, and that he will try. If he fails all is irreparably lost."

The chief Rabbi at Prague had ever exercised the greatest influence over his community. The assembly moreover perceived that he had deeper insight into the matter than themselves. Nothing therefore remained for them but to confide in his wisdom and experience, to let him have his way, and to await the end.

It was a painful situation. In order to appreciate its full significance, a little more light must be thrown upon it. The idea of banishment has in recent times, owing to the large number of emigrants who send themselves, so to say, into voluntary exile, lost so much of its original horror that we are very likely to be misled in our conception of it. The situation of a banished Jew in the Middle Ages was very different from that of an emigrant in these

days. The latter voluntarily forsakes his home after he has realized his immovable property. He is protected by the government and hopes to better his condition. He has found a new country where he is hospitably received. If he feels a longing for his fatherland, if he has grown rich and prosperous in the distant country, and would return again if he would die at home, and be buried in the grave of his forefathers, then the ship carries him back, he is again welcomed home, again becomes his country's child : he has two homes.

The Jew, on the contrary, was compelled to tear himself with bleeding heart from the spot which he had for centuries called home. The Jew was cast forth, poor and wretched, for even the wealthiest was impoverished by exile. His houses became worthless, for who would purchase a property that was from the necessity of the case to become shortly without an owner ? The stored up wares also which could not be carried with them in their wanderings in their search for a place of refuge, became valueless to the proprietors, especially as so large a number of Jewish merchants could not dispose of their effects at one and the same time. The debts due to them in the country could not be levied. The banished Jew of the Middle Ages

was without protection, for the home government refused him its protection, its sanction. The banished Jew of the Middle Ages could not but fear that his grey-haired parents, his wife, his tender children would perish under the unwonted fatigues of the journey; for how could he tell how long it might not be? The banished Jew of the Middle Ages was constrained to tear himself from the arms of his weeping betrothed when their roads separated, and knew not whether he should ever see her again in this life. The banished Jew of the Middle Ages might die in a remote foreign land of longing for the graves of his loved ones, might die, but not return.

The Jews were soon, however, to be relieved from this tormenting state of uncertainty, but only to obtain the most entire assurance of their misfortune. Some days after Pentecost the Imperial edict reached Prague, and was proclaimed on the same day in the Jews' quarter by the Governor. It ran thus: "The Jews must leave Prague in eight days, the country in four weeks."

At dawn on the day fixed morning service was celebrated in all the synagogues. In the largest synagogue the chief Rabbi officiated. As soon as the sun's first ray pierced through

the narrow windows of the synagogue the service commenced. The building was overflowing with worshippers. Many of the pious devotees had sunk on their knees, and lifted their clasped hands to heaven. The profound agony of being obliged to quit the holy spot for ever had mastered the whole assembly and had driven for a short time all care for the future out of their hearts. The prayers abounded in wonderfully striking passages, and soon nothing was heard in the entire building but the heart-rending sobs of the congregation.

The service came to an end. The chief Rabbi stood before the holy tabernacle to take leave of that consecrated place, which he had so often trodden, to take leave of his beloved congregation, and to strengthen and refresh them with the words of Holy Scripture for the dark uncertain future which was approaching.

"Friends and brethren," he began. The words died away on his trembling lips—a boundless emotion took possession of him. In vain he endeavoured to recover himself, his quivering lips refused to utter a word. A pause of profoundest silence for some time ensued. The Rabbi kissed the veil of the holy tabernacle, opened the sacred ark of the covenant, and took a roll of the law out of it. The head overseers

and the warders of the synagogue followed him unbidden. Then came the principal Talmudists, until all the rolls of the law had been removed. The Rabbi muttered a few more words of prayer in a low voice; then all left the synagogue in tears.

The chief Rabbi was the last but one; the head overseer of the community the last to retire from it. As the latter came out of the synagogue, he locked the gates, and handed the keys to the Rabbi. Both of them desired to speak as might be seen from the nervous twitchings of their lips; but both were silent. The last priest cannot have quitted the temple on Zion's hill with a heart more penetrated by grief.

Once more, as though he could not tear himself away, the Rabbi kissed the lintels of the synagogue; then the procession took itself to his residence, there to deposit the rolls of the law till the moment of departure arrived. After that the Rabbi went to the burial ground. The whole community impelled by one and the same noble feeling had here assembled to take leave of those who had gone to their long home before them, of the graves of their dead. No sound of sorrow disturbed the sacred quiet of the spot. Nought could be seen but a kneeling

multitude, pale faces and graves bedewed with tears. Bela, Mordechai's wife, among the rest, was kneeling on the grave of her father while hot tears trickled down her face. A twofold grief divided her heart. Where was Mordechai, her husband, the prop of her life ?

Gradually the vast burial ground was deserted. Each one had still preparation to make for the long weary journey. At eleven o'clock in the forenoon a gate of the Jews' quarter was thrown open through which they were all to defile. On the square facing it two regiments of infantry and some troops of cavalry were drawn up. A vast multitude had assembled to assist at the strange spectacle. The Viceroy had commissioned a superior officer to see to the execution of the decree. Each family on its departure was ordered to give satisfactory proof that it had satisfied all claims of the royal treasury, and to declare by which gate of the city it wished to leave. The confused stir in the Jews' quarter presented a melancholy sight. Before many doors stood a small cart drawn by a lean hack. They were intended to convey out of the country the old and sick who could not travel on foot. A group was standing before every door. Men with a wanderer's staff in their hands and a bundle which contained

all their transportable wealth on their backs. Women stood by them with children at their breasts.

At half-past eleven the officer in command ordered a trumpeter to ride through the streets and proclaim that they had only half an hour more, and that every one must make ready to depart. Friends and relatives now bade one another farewell in the open street. A warm pressure of the hand, a brotherly kiss, and then they would set out. The chief Rabbi had stationed himself at the gate of exit to comfort and bless the departing. At length the word of command rang out. Swords clashed as they were drawn from the sheath. The infantry ranged itself in line. The clock in the old Rathaus began to strike twelve. The Rabbi whispered words of encouragement and resignation into the ears of those who were to be the first to leave the Jews' quarter. Not a breath was audible ; a funereal silence prevailed. The clock struck one, two, three, four, five, up to twelve.

At the last stroke a sound of horses' hoofs was heard, and all eyes were turned in the direction of the Jesuits' College. A horseman was flying towards the Jews' quarter ; the smoking steed was covered with foam and blood, the

rider's face was convulsed and pale. He waved a roll of parchment in his hand and cried "Grace! . . . in the Emperor's name!" In front of the commandant he drew rein, and as he handed him the parchment sank swooning to the ground. The horse reeled, staggered, and fell at his side. At the same moment an imperial officer accompanied by a mounted trumpeter, galloped up at full speed. He waved a white flag and cried, "I confirm it in the name of his Apostolic Majesty! Grace!"

When the commanding officer perceived the Imperial signet, he uncovered his head and read the revocation of the edict. This was all the work of a minute. At the same instant a loud scream was heard, "Mordechai! father!" and Bela with her children forced her way through the crowd up to her husband, their father. The multitude assembled before the Jews' quarter had taken the warmest interest in the events of the morning. The unexpectedly fortunate issue excited the most joyful sympathy, and amidst the flourish of trumpets a thundering shout was raised, "Long live the Emperor! Long live Ferdinand the First!"

What passed in the hearts of men delivered from so great a peril cannot be described, cannot be conceived, can only be sympathized with

by one who, threatened by the same danger, has obtained the same deliverance. Every one now pressed round the unconscious Mordechai. Those nearest to him kissed the hem of his raiment. He was borne in triumphal procession to his house. Arrived there, the chief Rabbi said, "We will now leave Reb Mordechai to the care of his family; but before we ourselves do anything else, let us go into the synagogue, and render thanks to the Lord for this unexpected salvation." "Yes! to the synagogue! to the synagogue!" all joyously shouted, and the whole multitude followed the Rabbi to God's temple with hearts overflowing with gratitude.

THE PRISONER OF THE INQUISITION

" They consigned me for fifteen months to the most complete solitude."

The Prisoner of the Inquisition

ON a cold night in December, 1660, the wind blowing fiercely, in the intervals of its gusts a hailstorm pierced the thick mist which covered the city of Amsterdam. Nine o'clock had struck. The city appeared deserted, the tempestuous weather compelling the citizens to remain at home, when two men approached a small public-house having for its sign Absalom hung from a tree by his hair. A smell of rancid oil, spirits, and burnt wine assailed them on their entrance. They threw off their drenched cloaks and approached the warm stove, when several men who were carousing rose on recognizing in one of them Van Klief proprietor of the *Absalom*.

Van Klief had been in search of a physician

for his wife, who had been suddenly seized with a violent nervous attack. Failing to find his usual medical attendant, he had obtained the aid of a Spanish physician who had recently arrived in Holland. While the host and the doctor proceeded to the sick chamber, the topers resumed their talk, and refilled their pipes and glasses. Holland had always been distinguished by the liberty of conscience accorded to the followers of the law of Moses, and at this period it comprised several Israelite communities, which were distinguished for their prosperity and loyalty. The poorer classes among them were employed as labourers and in retailing street wares. To this class belonged many of the customers assembled on this occasion at the *Absalom*. The subject under discussion was the sacrifices they had made for their religion.

"I," exclaimed a fat fruit seller—"I remember one Friday having in my barrow some fruit, which began to spoil. I was trying to sell it when I heard the bell of the Shamas giving notice of its being time for Sabbath prayers. I quickly brought home my merchandise, which by Sunday morning was quite unsaleable."

"I," replied another, "was employed in a brewery, and would not continue to work during

the Passover where leaven was used. I preferred to leave my place."

"I," said a third, "was on a journey and could not obtain food prepared according to our religious rites. I was obliged to live on bread, water and eggs for fifteen days, and," he added with a deep sigh, "I could not even enjoy a little cheese."

"What is all that?" replied a meagre fellow, with a sallow complexion, long, bony arms, and hair like a negro's. "Listen to what I have done. One Kippour evening I was returning from the synagogue, when I heard a burgomaster, on getting into his sedan-chair, say to his porters, 'Don't go through the Jews' street; these dogs have a holiday, and I don't want to meet any of them this evening.' I said to myself, 'Hark ye, old carcass of a herring, I will repay thy insult,' whereupon I glided gently after him, and on the edge of a muddy stream I seized the chair and hurled it into the mud, with the burgomaster and his two porters."

A shout of laughter followed the recital of this feat; and the hero proudly brandished his strong arm while pacing the room and puffing smoke with a triumphant air. But to the astonishment of all a clear and firm voice exclaimed, "You did very wrong."

At these words a sensation was produced in the assembly. "Who said that?" was the shout from all parts of the room.

"I," tranquilly replied the Spanish physician who had re-entered the room with Von Klief. When he saw that astonishment prevented his auditory giving other proofs of their discontent, he added with energy, "Violence against a man not of our faith ought not to be tolerated by those who are truly religious."

Perceiving the listeners were moved by the force of his words, he seated himself near the fire and continued: "What I am about to relate will serve as an explanation of what I have said and will perhaps prove that the sacrifices I have made for my faith have been more difficult than throwing a burgomaster into the water. The scenes I am going to describe are of a sad character. Great misfortunes have pursued me, and I am not yet thirty."

"Thirty!" exclaimed the assembly with astonishment, for Don Balthazar Orobio, as the physician was called, appeared at least fifty, grief having prematurely wrinkled his countenance.

"My father," he continued, "a rich citizen of Madrid, possessed an immense fortune. This wealth had not been acquired by him; it was

hereditary, and to preserve it my forefathers had to submit to great sacrifices. You have doubtless heard of 'The Inquisition.' Under the pretext of protecting the Catholic religion, the Inquisition disgraced it with everlasting infamy and bloodshed. It persecuted the Jews, and in 1492 my family was condemned to leave the Peninsula.

"It is necessary to have lived under the beautiful sky and to have trodden the rich and fruitful soil of Spain, to know how difficult it is to tear oneself away from the charms of Spanish life. The thought of exile was insufferable to my ancestors. They preferred abjuring their faith and formed a portion of those hundred thousand Hebrew families who exchanged Judaism for Christianity. But as necessity and not conviction reduced them to this apostasy, they continued Israelites at heart, though Christians in exterior. The Inquisition, suspecting the sincerity of the pretended converts, took the most severe measures against those who were supposed to be still devoted to the synagogue.

"My grandfather, though appearing regularly in church, and enjoying the character of a good Catholic, still clung to the faith of his fathers. But my father, Don Caesar, in whom

Israelitish zeal was weakened, baptized me and intended to bring me up in the Catholic faith, not as an act of duty or of conscience, but seeing the vengeance of the Inquisition daily becoming more terrible, he resolved to renounce Judaism and to make his children Catholics. Unfortunately for his projects, my mother had still strong religious principles, and by her conversation she accustomed us from our earliest age to consider that the salvation of our souls depended on our being sincere and adhering to the Israelitish faith. We grew up, our education keeping pace with our years. Destined for the medical profession, I made rapid progress in the ground of this science. My sister, who was remarkably handsome, married a noble hidalgo ; and in less than a week afterwards my mother, sister and two brothers were attacked with a fatal disease. My grief was overwhelming and my father's despair was indescribable.

" From this period his character became gloomy. The slightest thing irritated him; his eyes were wild ; and I soon perceived that painful struggles continually agitated his breast. I soon learned the reason. My father, tortured by remorse, attributed all his misfortunes to his apostasy. ' I am guilty towards God,' he

said, 'and owe Him an expiation.' I then proposed to fly from Spain. His answer was, he ought to die where he was, and find rest in the tomb of his wife. His conduct could no longer escape observation. We were both arrested and thrown into the dungeons of the Inquisition.

"How can I relate all the monstrous proceedings of this tribunal? After the first examination, in which they endeavoured by every possible means to induce me to accuse my father, they consigned me for fifteen months to the most complete solitude, without books, in a dark dungeon, so damp that the mats on which I lay were rotten. I could have pardoned my tormentors for gagging me when I cried aloud, for striking me when I wept too audibly, and for allowing me to remain without proper furniture or clothes. But the most frightful punishment was that they did not speak once to me during the weary fifteen months of my poor father. If I asked whether he still lived, I could get no reply; and they cruelly laughed at me when I expressed a wish to know when I should be brought up for judgment.

"At length two gaolers came one day and led me in chains through many passages. From my long confinement I could not walk. I tot-

tered, and not being accustomed to the light, my eyes could not bear the flame of their torches. Instead, however, of supporting me, they struck me for not hastening my steps. We arrived at a subterranean grotto where a profound silence reigned. It bore the terrible inscription, 'Chamber of Torture.'

"In the centre of the chamber were dreadful instruments. On a sort of platform were three inquisitors. Their features were hidden under a cowl, as if they were afraid of exposing their countenances to the gaze of their victims. One of them again asked me to accuse my father of Judaism. I refused emphatically. A signal was given and two men advanced towards me, clad in black robes, their heads covered with cowls of the same colour, having merely apertures for the eyes, nose and mouth. They seized and stripped me of my tattered garments. The inquisitor again exhorted me to accuse my father. On my refusal he ordered them to apply the torture of the cord.

"They tied my hands behind my back by means of a cord passed through a pulley in the roof. The executioners then raised me in the air, and after holding me there some minutes, they suddenly let go the rope, and I remained swinging six or eight inches from the ground.

This terrible concussion dislocated all my joints, and the cord which bound my wrists lacerated the flesh. Look, friends, here are the marks."

The listeners recoiled in horror at the traces of torture.

"I was twenty-three years of age, of a vigorous constitution, and my spirit was unbending. I endured this torture and exclaimed, 'My father is innocent.'

"'Very well,' coolly said the same officer, 'proceed to the torture of fire.'

"The executioners tied my hands and legs so that I could not move. They then rubbed my feet with oil and placed me before a fierce fire till the flesh burst and the nerves and bones were exposed. At this moment I felt death approaching and swooned. I afterwards ascertained that a physician, always present at these tortures, declared that I could not endure more. I was taken back to my dungeon, and it was six months before I recovered the frightful tortures of that night; but my heart and soul were tranquillized—I had not accused my father.

"When I had partly recovered, I was told that I was to appear at the next *auto-da-fé*. A few days afterwards they dressed me in a shirt without sleeves, called a "san benito,"

with a large yellow cross on the breast and back. On my head they placed a cap made of pasteboard, on which were painted devils surrounded by flames. Thus clad, I was compelled to follow a solemn procession. We started from a church where our funeral service was celebrated, and proceeded to a large public square. On one side were raised platforms for the spectators, and on the other an amphitheatre for the condemned. We arrived chained and gagged, our feet bare, surrounded by soldiers, priests and penitents. I thought we were marching to death, and was happy at the approaching termination of my sufferings. After a sermon delivered by a monk, our sentence was read. I was condemned to pass my days in a cloister, where it was expected I should pronounce the vow of exclusion, declaring that all the property of my family was confiscated for the benefit of the Inquisition.

"Presently, about twenty paces from me, I saw a tottering old man advancing. In his trembling hand was a yellow wax candle. His emaciated features appeared familiar to me. Judge my horror when I heard it proclaimed that he was condemned to die, and that his name was Caesar Orobio! This wreck was my father, whom, in less than two years, they had

transformed into a decrepit old man. The fiends refused us the solace of a last embrace. He was led and tied to the funeral pile prepared for him, and there he exclaimed aloud, 'I deserve death, because I have, against my conscience, renounced the faith of my fathers. I am a Jew and die in the Jewish faith. Pardon me, Jehovah! And thou, my son, forget not the Jewish religion. Mayest thou soon be restored to it!' As he spoke these words, the smoke hid him from my sight.

"I was placed in a monastery, where I remained three months in a state of delirium. When I recovered my strength and senses, I resolved to use every effort to escape to a foreign country, where I could return to my religion and fulfil the dying wishes of my father. I pretended to be resigned to my lot. At the end of the second year of my confinement, I was appointed to make collections in the neighbouring villages for our monastery. For several weeks I was planning my escape, and ultimately I was enabled to effect my flight from Madrid disguised as a layman. I took the road to Portugal, and after a long and fatiguing journey arrived at Lisbon. The Inquisition was too powerful in this city to allow me to remain in it long. The relatives of my family supplied

me with sufficient money to enable me to embark for Holland. I have only been a month in Amsterdam, where I propose to reside, and exercise the profession of a physician. You will understand now why I believe that violence is a dangerous auxiliary for religion, and that Israelites ought especially to refrain from religious tyranny."

At this moment a girl came to announce that Von Klief's wife had drunk the doctor's draught and was better. Von Klief gratefully thanked him, offering a fee, which was declined. The audience gave utterance to their respect for the man who had displayed so much courage and suffered such misfortunes.

After exercising the profession of a physician in Amsterdam for several years, and distinguishing himself by benevolence towards the poor, Balthazar Orobio died in 1687 universally esteemed and regretted.

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